

Postdoc Association Toolkit

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I. Introduction

Postdoctoral Associations (PDAs) are a vibrant and dynamic source of support for postdoctoral fellows at their home institutions and nationally. There are many benefits to establishing and maintaining an active PDA. This toolkit is intended to serve as a resource guide to assist postdocs and their allies in starting and sustaining an effective PDA. In this toolkit, you'll find a wealth of information, including best practices shared from PDAs nationwide, suggestions on how to gain support from key institute administrators, strategies for conducting surveys and methods for affecting institutional policies. This toolkit builds on the extensive library of resources first developed by the Postdoc Network (PDN) of Science's Next Wave. Links are provided throughout the toolkit to the many articles and summaries created by the PDN. The NPA welcomes additions to this toolkit in the form of submissions from local PDAs that have important experiences to share that may be helpful to others.

II. Forming a PDA

II-1. Starting and maintaining a postdoctoral association (PDA)

It is important to recognize the level of commitment and time it will demand to accomplish this. You will gain enormous experience in how to work within, and navigate the administrative hierarchy, but do not forget it is your science that will determine your future success in your chosen career.

*** Most important – Adopt a POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE demeanor. Your initial demeanor will establish the overall position of the organization in the future and is critical to successfully rallying allies within the administration.

- Speak about unlocking the potential of the postdocs and increased productivity
- Win-Win attitude, happy well trained postdocs are less distracted and more productive
- Acknowledge the current financial constraints facing Universities – endowments reduced with stock market, government budgetary cuts – much can be done such as training and career counseling with minimal additional cost
- Concentrate first goals on these positive issues to become ingrained in the administration before tackling more controversial and costly issues of benefits and salaries
- Important to use these modest goals while you learn more about all sides of the issues, the politics of your institution, what is already being done regarding postdoc issues, and make institutional allies

I-1A. Critical Threshold

A brief point concerning timeline. You must remember to move quickly in the initial phase to become established before the enthusiasm wanes. Postdocs and administrators will need to see some benefit occurring and real organization before you gain their buy-in. Remember not to let perfectionism prevent initial progress. Start small, but at least start. Then maintain progress.

I-1B. Personnel

As in all organizations, many different personality types with different skill sets will likely be recruited. It is important to embrace this diversity if a robust PDA is to be formed. Each personality type brings with it unique advantages and potential weaknesses. It is important to encourage each of these types to contribute and recognize their strengths to focus their efforts toward the greatest effectiveness.

Examples of personalities (sample and not complete):

1. Bureaucrat - person who concentrates on the bureaucratic details such as formalized by-laws, meeting minutes etc. Advantage – useful in keeping the organizational details and navigating institutional rules and regulations. Caution – can keep a group focused on infinite details and hinder substantive movement forward.
2. Dreamer – person with ambitious goals for the organization. Advantage – provides creative and motivating goals for substantive effects. Caution – can become too distracted with over-ambitious goals and not attend to important details or make real progress towards realistic goals.
3. Activist – person driven by passionate emotions usually stimulated out of negative perspective and vague idea of “fairness”. Advantage – provides infectious commitment and motivation. Caution – negative demeanor can derail the process and emotional arguments can distract from the logical and collaborative discussions.

It is important that these and other personality types collaborate, each working to focus the others towards a common balanced goal. Critical to encourage each type to apply their skills in a constructive manner.

I-1C. Starting a PDA

Hurdles

1. Identifying postdocs and establishing contacts
2. Stimulating interest and involvement of postdocs
3. Identifying and fostering relationships with faculty and administrators

Solutions

1. Identifying and Contacting Postdocs - Building an Email List

Human resources

Variably useful– many institutions have so many vague definitions of how postdocs are classified that they likely will be of limited usefulness but this may be a starting point. Some HR offices may be reluctant to help, it may be more useful to have administrators backing your efforts with HR and put some muscle behind your inquiries.

Departmental administrators

Many department administrators may have information regarding their postdocs if you provide them with the definition you are using. Expect a varying effectiveness from different departments. Don't forget to enlist these administrators as your allies to disseminating your information to postdocs. i.e. ask about places to post your announcements for social and training events or ask for their email list (remember they will respond well to the idea of training, not so well to activism).

Knocking on lab doors

Bottom line – the most effective and complete way to fill in the gaps is by recruiting postdocs to go to each lab and knock on the doors and write down postdocs names and preferred email addresses – Try and divide the task and cover all departments within the university. A postdoc survey is a very useful additional way to illicit a response.

2. Stimulating Interest of Postdocs

Communicate the issues and potential of a PDA

Important to establish a positive and constructive stance at this stage and not stimulate activism or “victimization”. Career counseling and professional development are always safe and interest-stimulating topics to bring up.

Social events

Free food and drink is a sure winner. Often these events allow you to briefly convey your goals, get input from the postdocs about their concerns, and recruit postdocs into the PDA.

Communicate the benefits of becoming active in the PDA

Participation in the PDA gives valuable experience in working with the administration.

Subcommittees

Always motivating to enlist involvement in a specific area of interest. Provides opportunities to take a leadership role and have a vested interest.

3. Identifying and Fostering Relationships with Administrators and Faculty**Identify and meld currently existing related offices, faculty, and administrators**

Graduate student organizations and/or offices, career development offices, career workshops, departmental programs such as alternative careers.

Formation of a Postdoc Counsel

Representatives from postdoc, faculty and administrators.

Identify administrators in higher levels who are sympathetic

Many will respond well to being viewed as progressive leaders, Deans, vice-provost etc.

Presentations to administrative leaders and faculty leaders

Prepare a brief presentation and seek to present to as many groups as possible, be BRIEF, be positive – stress how the organizations goals will benefit them.

Remember to start with non-controversial issues that are win-win issues, concentrate on becoming ingrained in the administration before tackling the controversial issues such as salaries and benefits. These two issues are best addressed after you have become established. Why?

- It can set the administration against your organization before you have a chance to become well established,
- It will take time for your organization to learn about the complex interplay of factors involved in these issues,
- It will take time to learn how to navigate the administrative politics,
- You will need powerful allies within the administration to address these issues.

I-1D. Maintaining and Sustaining a PDA*Hurdles*

1. Administrative resistance
2. Postdoc interest
3. Member turnover
4. Growth

Solutions

1. Administrative Resistance

Attitude/philosophy

Positive and constructive with a solutions-based attitude and desire to benefit the postdocs, faculty, administration and scientific community at large. Examples: Postdocs – Many benefits related to providing career counseling, mentoring, and benefits. Faculty – Better trained postdocs, job postings, positive recruitment tool. Administration – Postdoc training, orientation, postdoc alumni network, talent retention.

Administrative allies

Existing offices such as graduate student office, career counseling/development, human resources, individual deans/vice-provost etc. These allies will usually be far less transient than the postdocs and can be critical to maintaining the PDAs goals.

Representation on important University counsels and boards

Become part of the administrative network.

2. Postdoc Interest Maintenance

Results

Make sure postdocs are kept aware of the results of the PDAs efforts. Positive results of any kind will be the most motivating factor and be sure to always advertise your successes and results.

Social events and orientation

Regular events that allow an opportunity to communicate in both directions. Orientation events introduce the PDA to new postdocs and recruit new members.

Frugal contact

Listservs and emails are important communication lines but do not tax the attention of busy postdocs or you could lose their interest.

3. Maintain Contacts and Working Relationship with Related Groups (e.g. International Student Organizations)

Member turnover

Organizational structure. Good to hold yearly elections, and have a defined and efficient method for officer promotion as members leave.

Pipeline

Use committee heads as a way to have a more extensive pipeline for new members to become involved in leadership roles while they become educated about the issues and are ready to move into officer positions.

Centralized Resources/Institutional Memory

Centralized computer with presentations, email list. Use a letter head and logo, maintain a bulletin board. Construct a University-based web site. Office space – possibly a space within an existing office may be the easiest initial option. (graduate student office, career advancement office etc.)

4. Growth

Philosophy of layering/steps

Start small, but at least start then build on this experience.

Incorporate pre-established programs

Skills programs.

Focus

Clearly defined and maintained.

Goals

Written with a timeline and prioritized.

5. Postdoctoral Association Networks

Draw on National Postdoc Association relationship

Advice, documents, resources, site visits.

Form contacts with other neighboring universities PDAs

Sharing of information.

Create regional networks of PDAs

Organize occasional area meetings.

II-2. Creating Bylaws for your PDA

Constructing the Bylaws or charter of your organization will be a vital component of the formation of your PDA. The bylaws communicate the structure, purpose and membership requirements of the organization to current members and potential new recruits, and provide the foundation for the successful operation of your organization. Although the Bylaws will have some features unique to your institution, there are some common topics that you need to cover. Briefly, you want to communicate the characteristics, the operation, and the general rules of the organization. Most bylaws should address the following topics:

1. Name of the organization
2. Purpose or objective
3. Operation/Governance - who is eligible for membership?
4. Roles and responsibilities of officers - election procedures
5. Formation and structure of committees - committee charges
6. General rules
7. Finances
8. Amendments

The Bylaws should be written with the input of all involved in the organization, and they should be reviewed on a regular basis, perhaps every 6 months to a year, so that any appropriate changes can be made. It is the membership of your PDA who would approve the Bylaws. The wording and language should be as accurate as possible and kept to a minimum, so that all may easily understand what you are trying to communicate.

A good reference for general Bylaw construction can be found in General Henry M. Robert's "Rules of Order". This book has been in publication for over a century and has become the bible for rule-setting and creating order within an organization.

Look to other currently existing PDA's for input and sample structures. Many PDA's have their Bylaws and Charters posted on the web. Some great examples include:

- [National Cancer Institute Fellows and Young Investigators Association](#) (Appendix 1: National Cancer Institute PDA Bylaws)
- [Stanford University Postdocs Association](#) (Appendix 2: Stanford PDA bylaws)
- A review of [The National Postdoctoral Association](#) Bylaws may also be helpful.

II-3. Executive Summary

The attached New York University School of Medicine 2003 Postdoctoral Handbook was drafted to recognize the essential role that postdoctoral fellows and postdoctoral trainees have to a vital research institution. Prior to this document, there has not been a formal text that addresses the distinctive needs of these young scientists. This information was gathered and recorded in a standardized manner to establish formal guidelines that would be applicable to the unique role of post-docs at New York's University School of Medicine.

There is a substantial amount of information and though all of it is important, this executive summary highlights much of the significant content within the Postdoctoral Handbook. Please refer to the Postdoctoral Handbook for all the salient details.

Post-Doc Definition

"A postdoctoral appointee is a person who has recently earned a Ph.D., M.D. or equivalent doctoral degree the appointee joins the NYU School of Medicine to perform academic research full-time under the supervision of a member of the faculty. The position is meant to provide additional research and or scholarly training in preparation for a position in academia, industry, or government. The appointee position can only be held for up to five years."

Establishment of a Maximum Period for a Post-Doc Fellowship

The five (5) year limitation would include all time served as a post-doc at the NYU School of Medicine, and also would include time spent as a post-doc at any other institution.

Revisions of Post-Doc Titles

We are recommending that the current titles used for Post-docs be revised as follows: POSTDOC TRAINEE (to be utilized with Training Grant positions), previously known as Postdoctoral Fellow. A Post-doc Trainee would be funded from individual or institutional NIH Training Grants called National Research Service Awards or "F32"s and "T32"s.

POSTDOC FELLOW (to be utilized with Non-Training Grant positions), previously known as Research Assistant. This title would be used to pay an individual performing as a post-doc with monies that are non-training grant money. This title can also be used to supplement Training grant money.

Post-docs that are funded by both sources will be given two titles and issued two checks.

Establishment of a Minimal Salary Level

All postdoctoral appointees must receive at least the recommended minimum NRSA stipend levels as her or his base salary compensation.

Benefits

Health insurance is available for the post-doc as well as eligible dependents. Post-docs are eligible for medical coverage with United PPO Basic and PPO Plus and various HMO's. The plans include a Basic Prescription Plan.

Time Off

Vacation requests are at the discretion of the Principal Investigator, since it is predicated on the operational needs of the department.

Sick Leave

All Post-docs are eligible for up to a period of up to thirty (30) days of paid sick leave (in total) for any time out due to illness or injury. For any time out (subsequent to the initial thirty (30) days, a claim for disability should be filed) for absence from work due to injury or illness, but not to exceed twenty-six (26) weeks in total.

Maternity

Consider the establishment of a maximum Maternity leave policy consisting of both disability and non-disability periods running concurrently with the twelve (12) weeks available under the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Family & Medical Leave Act

Post-docs who have been on staff for more than twelve (12) months and have worked a minimum of 1250 hours in the prior twelve (12) months are eligible for a leave of absence under the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The maximum leave time would be twelve (12) weeks, in a twelve (12) month period.

Personal Leave of Absence

An unpaid leave, “Personal Leave of Absence” may be granted for personal reasons after six (6) months of continuous employment contingent upon the operational needs of the department. The total leave shall not exceed three (3) months.

Probationary Review Period

All post-docs of the NYU School of Medicine should be advised that at the time of hire or transfer to another laboratory; they must successfully complete a probationary period. The recommended probationary period is six (6) months in length. A preliminary review of the post-doc’s performance should be made in advance of the completion of the probationary period. If it is determined that additional time is needed to evaluate the post-doc’s job performance, an extension not to exceed an additional six (6) month period, can be added to the probationary period.

Standardized Postdoctoral Appointment Letters

When a post-doc is hired at the School of Medicine, Faculty and Administrative Offices will use the standardized template appointment letters included in the Handbook and receive annual re-appointment letters of their post-doc fellowship.

Establishment of a Formal Grievance Process

This would be intended to address problems that arise which may not have any resolution through normal channels. “Grievance Issues” come in many varieties: ranging from academic disputes, to those that are interpersonal and work related. The recommendation would be to establish a grievance committee. This committee would be comprised of the Senior Associate Dean for Biomedical Sciences, the Director of Human Resources for the NYU School of Medicine and two other faculty members. The additional two faculty members would be chosen from a pool of eight faculty members that agree to be part of the grievance process. The grievance committee’s main objective is to promote better channels of communication throughout the NYU School of Medicine Postdoctoral Program.

We hope that this synopsis has provided some insight to the many, varied informative parts contained within the recommended 2003 Postdoctoral Handbook.

III. Identifying administrators responsible for research and training policies

Institutions that host postdoctoral scholars are often complex bureaucracies. This is especially true of both academia and government agencies. For postdocs in industry, the level of bureaucracy may be slightly less, but can still be daunting. Each institution has its own unique administrative structure and finding the right administrators who have responsibility for postdoctoral training/research can sometimes be a challenge. At certain institutions, the responsibility for oversight of postdoctoral training may not be explicitly assigned to anyone. In order for a postdoctoral association (PDA) to work effectively, it helps to have a designated institutional administrator (or faculty member) who can serve as a liaison to the PDA. Regular meetings and ongoing dialogue should be the hallmark of a productive relationship between a PDA and the designated institutional administrator.

If you are unclear about who is the right person to approach about postdoctoral training issues, consider department heads, human resources and personnel staff, or perhaps even the director's office. Search the web page for your institution or a published staff directory that includes people's job titles. In an academic setting, the most likely places to begin are the offices of the Graduate School Dean, or the Dean for Research (if such positions exist). These position titles may vary and include senior, associate or vice deans/provosts. At some very large academic institutions with multiple schools and campuses, start at your home department, school or campus and work your way up until you get the answers you need.

If it becomes clear after multiple inquiries that there is no single entity charged with oversight for postdoctoral affairs at your institution, the PDA leadership should ask for a meeting with the institution's top administrator. The goal of this meeting should be to (a) gain administrative consent that establishes responsibility upon the institution to provide oversight for postdoctoral affairs, and that (b) responsibility should be assigned to a specific individual or office. Your PDA can use the various reports and studies from prestigious national organizations (available through the NPA website) that will support your case for developing more explicit policies governing postdocs at your institution, including the identification of an administrator responsible for postdoctoral policies, programs and services. For example, the Association of American Universities (<http://www.aau.edu/reports/PostdocRpt.html>), the American Chemical Society (<http://www.chemistry.org/portal/a/ContentMgmtService/resources?id=c373e9f7607a06408f6a4fd8fe800100>), and the Council of Graduate Schools (<http://www.cgsnet.org/>) have all taken steps to incorporate postdoctoral training and research issues into the portfolios of their graduate education committees or programs. Although it is important that postdocs maintain a distinct identity from graduate students, this is the most logical starting place for many academic institutions. Overtime, PDA interactions with designated administrators should lead to the establishment of separate structures for addressing postdoctoral training issues.

In addition to identifying individual administrators and establishing a strong working relationship with them, there may also be institutional committees or advisory boards comprised of faculty and administrators with some role in establishing or implementing policies, programs

and services for postdoctoral scholars. For the same reasons stated above, it will be important to determine whether these bodies exist, identify who serves on them, and how you can make contact with them or even be appointed to serve as a member.

For further guidance on working with administrators, you might consider consulting with the leadership of postdoc associations and offices at institutions of similar size and scope. The NPA Institutional Policy Database and listing of PDA/PDO members can help you to locate and connect with these organizations.

IV. Gaining Support from Faculty and Administrative Advocates

Identification of sympathetic faculty and administrative staff is the key to gaining support for your newly forming PDA. Consider what groups are already established in your institution, for example a career development office or a graduate research and training office. In general these groups will be extremely receptive to finding out about the true needs of the postdoc community – after all, these types of offices exist to aid in your training. Approach them with a well-formed plan – perhaps a brief presentation detailing your reasons for forming the PDA, and why it would benefit both the postdoc community AND the institution. Having a successful PDA will provide a voice for the postdocs, thus leading to changes that improve the overall postdoc experience. This in turn will aid the institution by retaining top talent, and having better trained postdocs.

Shown below is an example of an actual letter written by a chair of a PDA seeking to obtain support from institutional faculty and staff. All names have been changed to protect privacy. This type of letter is an ideal way to communicate the benefits of having a PDA, and can serve to highlight any achievements of the PDA thus far. It also brings attention to the NPA, and therefore provides links to a great resource for all parties interested in becoming more involved with the postdoc community. The second letter was written by the NPA Executive Director, Alyson Reed, to the Dean of Research, in support of the formation of the PDA.

Sample Support Letter from PDA

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great enthusiasm that we would like to convey the ongoing development and growth of Generic University Postdoctoral Association (GUPA). Our founding five months ago by Drs. Jane Doe and John Jones, in the Department of Molecular Biology here at Generic University, was sparked by a national movement initiated by the AAAS sponsored National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). Through its efforts, the NPA has generated an overwhelming response from Postdoctoral Associations throughout the United States. We hope to carry this torch to Generic University so that both Postdoctoral Scholars and the University benefit from the momentum. Indeed, many of our sister Universities with well-established Postdoctoral Associations have enriched the lives of their Postdoctoral Scholars. The goal of this letter is to tell you about GUPA in an effort to generate your support for our establishment at Generic University.

GUPA's Mission - To create, nourish, and sustain an academic community for Postdoctoral Scholars at Generic University, thereby fostering recognition and positive change.

GUPA's Charter - The purpose of the Generic University Postdoctoral Association (GUPA) is to create, nourish, and sustain an academic community for Postdoctoral Scholars at Generic University, thereby fostering recognition and positive change. Membership shall include all scholars with a doctorate degree who do not currently hold a permanent full-time faculty position at Generic University. Specifically, persons holding such titles as postdoctoral trainee, postdoctoral fellow, research fellow, research associate, or medical center fellow are eligible for membership. Our goals include, but are not limited to:

1. Providing a forum for social gatherings and scholarly camaraderie;
2. Providing information to new and existing postdocs (e.g. welcoming committees, foreign visas, grant opportunities, housing locations, etc);
3. Providing a forum for discussion of postdoctoral issues (e.g. career development, salary, benefits);

4. Connecting our postdocs with national organizations such as the National Postdoctoral Association, AAAS, Science's Next Wave and Sigma Xi.

The Generic University Postdoctoral Association is not, and shall not, serve as a bargaining unit for any employee of the University in keeping with the standards established by the National Postdoctoral Association.

Brief History-In January 2003, a National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) was established with its roots in Washington, DC (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>). In March, through funding by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and sponsorship by AAAS, the NPA held its inaugural annual meeting in conjunction with the Postdoc Network (http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/career_stage/post_doc_1).

Desiring to establish a Postdoctoral Association at Generic University, Dr. Jane Doe applied for, and received, an NPA/Postdoc Network travel award to attend this meeting. Upon returning from the NPA meeting, Dr. Jane Doe recruited the help of Dr. John Jones. Together, they worked to establish a database of identified Postdoctoral Scholars so that word of GUPA's creation could be spread through a formal Listserve. To facilitate the endeavor, Drs. Doe and Jones set up a GUPA Cookout, posted flyers and coordinated a generous contribution by Faster Scientific, and funding by the Departments of Cancer Biology, Neuroscience, and Pharmacology. The results were promising. Over 50 Postdoctoral Scholars attended, and many more names were added to the database through RSVPs.

Inspired by the success of the first cookout in June, and with the help of Mrs. Elaine Smith, the GUPA Postdoctoral Database has grown to over 200 M.D., Ph.D. and M.D./Ph.D. persons who do not currently hold a permanent full-time faculty position at Generic University. These Postdoctoral Scholars have been identified in multiple departments from both Medical Center and Main-Campus. At our last cookout, additional funds were provided by the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and over 100 Postdoctoral Scholars attended. More recently, Dr. Jane Doe has arranged an association between GUPA and the Department of Cancer Biology to attend the Cancer Biology Career Development Seminar Series in an effort to facilitate GUPA's mission and goals.

GUPA continues to focus its efforts on multiple fronts: First, we are continuing to work hard to reach out to all Postdoctoral Scholars who do not currently hold a permanent full-time faculty position at Generic University in order to extend an invitation to join our association. Second, due to the hard work of Dr. Jane Doe, Acting Chair of our Association, Generic University has been selected by Sigma Xi to be a pilot site for its Postdoctoral Survey while her travel award to the first meeting of the NPA has provided us with national recognition as an up-and-coming association. Third, Dr. David Archer has taken the initiative to volunteer as a Science's Next Wave Campus Representative at Generic University which will help in our efforts to increase Postdoctoral Scholar awareness of this internationally recognized organization. Fourth, Drs. James Waterford, Chris Lee, Angela Stanford and Lauren Friedman have developed the base for both our events and membership committees. Despite such progress, however, we are in need of your support. GUPA needs to obtain recognition and support from the Generic University faculty and staff in order to become an official GU sponsored organization. Therefore, we need your help in the form of a letter stating that you support GUPA's efforts to become an official organization. If you are willing to send such a letter of support for the postdoctoral scholars throughout both Medical Center and Main-Campus, please send your letter to:

Jane Doe, Ph.D., Dept. of Molecular Biology, Generic University, Genericville 00001

Respectfully,
Jane Doe, PhD
Chair, Generic University Postdoctoral Association

John James, PhD
Vice-Chair, Generic University Postdoctoral Association

Sample Letter for Support from NPA

Dear Dr. Beckman:

On behalf of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA), I am pleased to support the Generic University Postdoctoral Association (GUPA) and the efforts of Jane Doe, PhD, as Co-Chair of GUPA. As you may know, NPA is a member-driven organization that provides a unique, national voice for postdoctoral scholars. We are a collaborative organization that seeks to work with all stakeholders to improve the postdoctoral experience in the United States. For an overview of the NPA, please see <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/>. Postdoctoral scholars from across the country have formed the NPA to address national issues relevant to postdocs and focus public debate on how to improve the lives of postdocs at all levels. The NPA is supported through a generous grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and is sponsored by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The NPA national office was established at AAAS headquarters in Washington, D.C. in January 2003.

The NPA's mode of action is to develop a consensus among postdocs regarding the key issues to be addressed at both local and national levels. The NPA plans to work towards positive change and implementation of policies pertaining to postdoctoral fellows at the local level by working closely with individual Postdoctoral Associations and Postdoctoral Offices, and at the national level through collaborations with professional societies and funding agencies.

NPA supports the Generic University Postdoctoral Association (GUPA) in its mission to create, nourish, and sustain an academic community for Postdoctoral Scholars at Generic University, thereby fostering recognition and positive change.

Dr. Doe has been a productive member of the NPA Outreach Committee since the Association's inaugural meeting, which she attended. Her travel award to this meeting was based upon her description of a compelling and tangible goal to found a postdoctoral association at Generic University in collaboration with her advisor, Dr. Brenda Wendell, Chair of the Department of Molecular Biology. She recognized early-on the potential for the NPA to foster improvements in the postdoctoral experience, and that it could be an organization crucial to the rapid, productive, and positive formation of postdoctoral associations at the local level. She has learned a great deal from her interactions with the NPA and has applied this to her association founding plans with great success. She has interacted with other postdoctoral associations in her region, kept in touch with postdoctoral affairs on multiple levels, and is leading the Generic University's pilot site participation in the Sigma Xi National Postdoc Survey. Furthermore, she has demonstrated so far that she can balance these responsibilities with her scientific work.

Taken together, these concerted actions demonstrate the outstanding potential for the GUPA to become a successful institutional advocate for positive change, and the NPA supports the mission of the GUPA.

Sincerely,
Alyson Reed
Executive Director
National Postdoctoral Association

V. Budget and Obtaining Funds

Sample Budget

Generic University Postdoctoral Association (GUPA)

Preliminary Budget Plan for the GUPA to become self-sustaining with assistance from the University.

Year 1

\$? Membership dues for Postdoctoral Scholars

\$? Contributions from Departments

\$? University Funds

\$? Contributions from Business Sector

Year 2

\$? Membership dues for Postdoctoral Scholars

\$? New Contributing Departments

\$? Previous Contributing Departments

\$? University Funds

\$? GUPA Fundraising

\$? Contributions from Business Sector

Year 3

\$? Membership dues for Postdoctoral Scholars

\$? Determine an annual budget from the University (to make up 50% of GUPA budget)

\$? GUPA Fundraising

\$? Contributions from Business Sector

VI. Legal Issues for PDAs

Many universities have policies governing the formation of campus organizations / associations. There may be student governments, faculty senates, employee unions or other administrative councils and decision-making bodies that have official or quasi-official recognition from the university. As postdocs, your status may not be clearly defined. In some instances, postdocs may be considered employees. When postdoc employees come together to discuss workplace issues, this may be perceived by university administrators and employee bargaining units (unions) as an attempt to form a new union or engage in collective bargaining on behalf of postdoc employees. It is very important at the outset that a nascent PDA make its intentions clear to all. If your PDA intends to engage in collective bargaining activities, you should obtain legal advice from a competent labor attorney. If your PDA is not interested in forming a union or collective bargaining activities, your mission statement and bylaws should clearly state this. In order to gain official status within your institution, these documents may need to be submitted to the university's legal counsel for review. In one instance at a prominent university, legal counsel advised that financial support of the PDA could potentially amount to the establishment of an "employer-sponsored union." This institutional support for the PDA could possibly be viewed as coercive and might potentially lead to abuse. To avoid these and other problems of perception and intent, it is best to state your purpose and goals clearly.

VII. Continuity of Leadership

The position of postdoctoral scholar is a temporary one. One of the main challenges for an association serving those in temporary positions is sustainability. Many PDAs get off to a good start under the dynamic leadership of some very passionate, active and engaged postdoctoral scholars. But sustaining the momentum can be a challenge. Perhaps the early leaders move-on to new positions, or the PDA is successful in addressing a major area of concern and postdocs no longer see a compelling reason to stay involved. In either scenario, it is critical for the leaders of the PDA to be thinking about leadership succession issues. In other words, who will lead the PDA after we are gone? After all of the effort and personal investment of time you have made in developing the PDA at your institution, you don't want the PDA to wither on the vine after you leave. Therefore, it is important to have a strategy for identifying future leaders, and also a process for making a smooth transition to new leadership.

A number of postdoc associations have successfully addressed this challenge. Their stories may be found by clicking on the following links:

- [Learning From Experience: Postdoc Associations Share Their Wisdom on Getting Started and Forging Ahead.](#)
- [The UNC-PDA organizes itself to assure momentum, continuity, and success.](#)
- [History and Evolution of the Stanford University Postdoc Association.](#)
- [The Ongoing Challenges of the UCSF Postdoc Association.](#)

In addition, this article provides tips on [Ten Ways to Identify a Promising Person.](#)” Another article on [Spotting a Leader](#) details the numerous ways that define a good leader, and how to identify that person.

Procedures to Ensure Continuity of Leadership

In addition to recruiting your successor, you will need to ensure that procedures are in place to elect or appoint new leadership, provide a thorough orientation, and allow time for a period of transition. For a PDA to be able to function effectively, it is essential that transitions between successive generations of postdocs with leadership responsibilities proceed smoothly. There is often a lag time associated with accepting any new position of responsibility, and the goal of a productive PDA is to ensure that new leadership is incorporated into their group as seamlessly as possible.

Leadership Continuity is a terminology widely used in the business world as a means to convey a method of staying current, which is essential for the survival of any successful business. The same holds true to the formation and successful maintenance of a Postdoctoral Association and its representation of a given postdoctoral community.

The schedule of a postdoctoral scholar can often be full, to the point that he/she may not be able to continuously contribute to the PDA. Thus, many PDA's requiring significant time

commitments from their postdoctoral community may find it difficult to maintain a standardized group of leadership positions. Many PDAs stipulate a minimum term that positions of leadership be held, for example, a one year period. This will serve two purposes: 1) imposes a finite time period whereby the PDA officer agrees to be committed to his/her responsibilities, and 2) provides a long enough time period that a successor may be groomed for transition into leadership position.

Many PDAs utilize different mechanisms for election and period of service of their postdoc officers. At New York University School of Medicine, for example, the Postdoctoral Council consists of six postdocs, and new officials are elected by a unanimous vote of the council. There are no restrictions on the time of service, and anyone wishing to retire from service may do so at any time, with the full understanding of the council.

By contrast, at Rockefeller University, the PDA's Representative Committee consists of five members, appointed annually by regulated elections involving the whole postdoctoral community. It is expected that each member of the Committee will serve the entirety of his or her twelve-month term.

Consider the following guidelines:

1. Appointments to a PDA leadership position could be for a minimum of one year. There could exist a policy whereby members will notify the co-chairs sufficiently prior to the expiration of their term to allow time for their replacement to be appointed and grandfathered in. This notification should occur at the time of a scheduled PDA leadership meeting.
2. Continued Appointment: To remain in good standing, members should strive to attend a large percentage of the scheduled PDA meetings. Such attendance is essential to continue the flow of leadership ideas as new leaders are conditioned from existing members. C. Overlapping terms of appointment: A useful policy to consider implementing is one that allows for incoming officials to work alongside more experienced counterparts during the early stages of their appointment. This could work in a number of ways, for example by simply having longer or flexible appointment terms.
3. Staggered Leadership can be an option. The appointment can be for a two year period. The first group decides which board members/PDA officers will stay for one year and who will stay for two years. Every year, there will be turnover of the group; however, everyone's term will not end at the same time. This is how the NPA Executive Board is set up.
4. The Chair of the PDA will have a lot of responsibilities. The ideal person to lead the PDA is someone who is established in the lab and institution. A senior postdoc will know most of the issues in the institute, but their priorities will be to move on from their postdoctoral position. A suggestion could be to recruit a postdoc in their 2nd or 3rd year to Chair the PDA for a one year term. In the second year, they can act as ex-officio Chair. This will ensure the transfer of tacit knowledge.

VIII. Identifying Postdocs

It is important to find out how many postdocs are in your institute, so that you can establish regular communications and survey them to find out the immediate concerns that need to be addressed. For more information on how to conduct a survey, please refer to the following link: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/outreach_committee/survey. These data you collect about postdocs can be used to make presentations to people in the institute to gain advocates and help create change in your institute. Knowing who the postdocs are also helps build a stronger association and will help identify people that can volunteer in the association to maintain continuity of leadership. At this point, you need names of postdocs and their departments, and their email addresses. For a PDA to get an accurate count of postdocs in their institute, key partnerships must be made. We will discuss a couple of strategies that can be used.

The Human Resources Department will have the most extensive database, although it may not be completely accurate. Why don't institutes have an accurate count of all postdocs? The biggest challenge lies in their postdoc title and method of funding. The human resources database will most likely contain a list of postdocs that are paid from institutional dollars or grants that are managed by the institute (i.e. NRSA). This will represent the majority of postdocs. However, HR may not have a list of people that are bringing in their own funding and are paid directly from a funding agency or alternative institution. The human resources staff strives to maintain accurate records. For example, new HIPAA regulations require that the institute maintain a record of people that work with patient samples.

A faculty advocate can help you identify the appropriate person in human resources. For more information on how to identify these individuals, please refer to this section of the toolkit: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/outreach_committee/identify/. For more information on gaining support please refer to this section of the toolkit: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/outreach_committee/gainingsupport/.

To enlist the support of others in identifying postdocs, consider making a presentation. Prepare your presentation by doing your research on other institutes with successful postdoc programs. You may have to start with the definition of a postdoc. See these links for more information: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/outreach_committee/definition or <http://www.nap.edu/openbook/0309069963/html/1.html#pagetop>. For more information on the purpose of the training period, and how valuable postdocs are to the research enterprise in your institute, visit this link: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/Go_to_group/view?searchterm=zerhouni. Share with them your vision of what a PDA can do for the postdocs and the institute. Improving the postdoc experience will make your institute more attractive to the best and brightest talent in the country and abroad, which will lead to better research, publications and grant funding. Let them know of other institutes that have successful postdoc programs and that you would like to see that success occur in your institute. All of this begins with the process of identifying postdocs.

Another strategy is to partner with the science/research recruiter, if your institution has one. This person is usually a member of the HR staff, and processes the paperwork necessary to hire

postdocs, graduate students and technicians. Because they deal with postdocs regularly, they hear their concerns and know of their experiences. This may be a good person to partner with. The recruiter will be able to identify the people in HR that can help you obtain the data. Your approach to this person must be amicable. Use the materials outlined above.

An alternative strategy is to find a postdoc and/or faculty advocate in each department. Build a partnership with someone in each department's business office. Ask them for a list of postdocs in their departments along with their emails. This approach is more labor intensive, but will likely be more accurate than the database in human resources. With an accurate tally of postdoc names and departments, you will have a database that will be valuable to human resources. They will be more likely to partner with you in future projects if you help them correct their database.

An additional strategy for identifying incoming postdocs is to run a regular orientation session, introducing new postdocs to policies, programs and events at your institution. Incoming postdocs can be targeted using HR personnel lists, flyer advertising as well as word-of-mouth, all of which increases the visibility of the PDO/PDA. Some more information on orientations can be found at: http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/committees/outreach_committee/orientation.

A reference search in Science's Nextwave:

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/advanced_search

using the keywords "Identifying postdocs" reveals many interesting articles. Here are a couple of articles that outline other strategies and what they did with the data:

Learning From Experience: Postdoc Associations Share Their Wisdom on Getting Started and Forging Ahead, by Deborah Swope

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0770/learning_from_experience_postdoc_associations_share_their_wisdom_on_getting_started_and_forging_ahead/

Surveying Postdocs: A Tale From the Trenches, by Orfeu Buxton and Stephen Gasior

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1330/surveying_postdocs_a_tale_from_the_trenches/

IX. Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys

Surveys can be used for many different purposes, such as identifying postdocs, evaluating their experience and mentoring, programs needed, and whether salary and benefits are equitable and fair. Data collection of this kind can help Postdoctoral Associations present the issues to administrators and faculty to raise awareness with data in hand.

Surveys, however, are difficult to do. They need to be worded appropriately with very specific questions that leave little room for interpretation, and they need to be analyzed properly.

The Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey

If the timing is right, the NPA strongly encourages institutions to participate in the Sigma Xi National Postdoc Survey. By participating in the survey, Sigma Xi can save you the trouble of designing, conducting and interpreting the results of your own survey.

Requirements to participate in the Sigma Xi Postdoc Survey:

The survey needs to go through Institutional Review Board (IRB) process in your institute because it falls under the Human Research Subjects area. However, because identifiers are removed and there is “minimal risks” to humans, most institutes will opt for an expedited review (by definition does not mean faster) or is exempt.

If it does go through any review process the P.I. will have to undergo Human Subjects Research Training. There are two P.I.s conducting this research from the institutional standpoint. Geoff Davis from Sigma Xi and the local institute official (PDO Director or institutional official that deals with postdocs). This is the same training that researchers have to perform when they are working with human subjects, such as clinical trials, collecting samples or performing a survey. Some institutes offer this training online.

Collect postdocs’ e-mail addresses and submit to Sigma Xi. You are able to apply for a \$300 award from Sigma Xi to either pay for a temp to research and collect e-mail or host a social gathering, such as a pizza party for postdocs and collect e-mails.

You have the option to add 10 questions to the survey that will address specific questions or issues directly relevant to the institute. You have the option to share your data with others. This will also give you the opportunity to see the data from other institutes that agreed to share data. Only the aggregated data will be shared.

Results from the Sigma Xi Survey:

Sigma Xi will create a website for each participant and e-mail the URL to the postdoc.

Sigma Xi will follow-up with postdocs and send reminders to complete the survey.

The data collected will be analyzed and presented to the institutional P.I.

Postdoc confidentiality will be respected by eliminating identifiers to ensure that a postdoc’s identity cannot be discovered.

You receive the survey results. If you have agreed to share your data, you also receive the data from other institutes. <http://postdoc.sigmaksi.org/Reports/>

To get more information about participating in the Sigma Xi National Survey, please visit: <http://postdoc.sigmaksi.org/>

You can read about NPA's participation in the Sigma Xi National Survey at: <http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/survey/>

If you are not able to participate in the survey, you can develop your own survey. Sigma Xi provides questions that were asked in past surveys. http://postdoc.sigmaksi.org/questions/existing_surveys/past_surveys

Implementing Your Own Survey Project

To learn more about strategies for conducting a survey project that is specific to your institution, the NPA interviewed Joan Schwartz, Assistant Director at the Office of Intramural Research at NIH. A survey of postdocs in the intramural program at NIH was successfully conducted in 2002. <http://felcom.nih.gov/Mentoring/Survey.html>

How did you formulate the survey questions?

A subcommittee of our fellows committee prepared the questions, in collaboration with senior investigators in our division of epidemiology (DCEG) who are experts in survey questions

How did you disseminate the survey and encourage potential respondents to complete it?

We hired a contractor to handle this. The surveys were sent out in hard copy, by FedEx to ensure that everyone at least opened the package. Several reminders were sent, as well as a second copy of the survey to those who had not responded. We offered incentive awards to the first 10% to respond, which were either lunch with Drs. Kirschstein and Gottesman, or a \$25 gift certificate to the NIH FAES bookstore.

How did you tabulate the survey results (software? volunteer? staff?)

The contractor tabulated everything and provided us the data. The mentoring subcommittee did all the statistical analyses, and again several of them were in DCEG so they were experienced at doing this sort of work. So bottom line - all volunteer!

How were the survey results used to inform decision-making?

The fellows presented the results to our scientific directors, who then formed a subcommittee that came up with a set of policies in response <http://www1.od.nih.gov/oir/sourcebook/ethic-conduct/sdpolicy-mentoring.htm>

What advice would you give to others developing a survey at their institute? Anything you would do differently next time?

We felt very positive about the whole experience, especially having gotten a 72% response rate, and are hopeful that the Sigma Xi survey will provide a three year follow-up since we will be able to include questions that are a direct follow-up. It was a lot of work but we all felt very

positive about it, especially since the Scientific Directors did respond in such a positive way to the results.

Sample Surveys

FELCOM Survey

<http://felcom.nih.gov/Mentoring/Survey.html>

NCI Center for Cancer Research – Fellows and Young Investigators also developed a very good survey that was used at their annual retreat. [Click here to view a PDF of the survey](#)

Develop Online Surveys

Developing an online survey would be possible, but would require a lot of effort. Collaboration with the institutes IT Department would need to be set up. Two big issues will be (1) security and (2) effort. Firewalls just aren't enough. The types of information asked of postdocs can be sensitive and could be used against them (in a worst case scenario). A tremendous amount of effort would be needed to design and structure the questions for any kind of survey, but in addition your IT group will have to find and get rid of bugs.

The advantages of an online survey are that once it is completed, it can be used in the years to come to collect long-term data. This is a big advantage for the institute. One can track the progress of change in postdoc policy and whether or not postdocs are happy with the changes. One can also assess whether the needs of the postdocs are being met over time. Re-taking the survey would much easier. Another advantage is that data entry would be minimal since the data would be electronic. This makes analysis much easier.

If you are looking for quick feedback, a paper survey is probably the best route for a Postdoc Assoc. A Postdoc Office would most likely put the effort into developing an online survey.

Relevant Articles

Survey of Surveys I: What Postdoc Association Surveys Tell Us About Postdoc Working Conditions. T.L. Nally reviews Professional Development, Salary and Benefits, Rating the Postdoctoral Experience, and Tracking Progress from data taken from 12 Postdoc Assoc surveys.
http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1680/survey_of_surveys_i_what_postdoc_association_surveys_tell_us_about_postdoc_working_conditions/

Survey of Surveys II: Polling Postdocs Effectively. In this article, T.L. Nally addresses Top Five Survey topics, Demographics, Survey Design, and Response Rate.

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1750/survey_of_surveys_ii_polling_postdocs_effectively/

Surveying Postdocs: A Tale from the Trenches

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1330/surveying_postdocs_a_tale_from_the_trenches/

A Guide to Surveys by, for, and of Postdocs has many other links to other surveys and other articles for those that want to really dive into the intricacies of making a postdoc survey.

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1680/a_guide_to_surveys_by_for_and_of_postdocs/

X. Institutional Procedures Governing Policy Changes

The first steps in preparing for policy change have already been set out in this toolkit. It is essential to identify the key administrators responsible for research and training policies and begin a dialogue with such officials early in the process of considering policy change. These administrative contacts will understand the institutional barriers to policy change. They will be able to determine which policies will need to go through a formal approval process and which may be able to be achieved in a more expedited fashion. Moreover, by working with them in a collegial manner, they will become your advocates in the process. Do not ignore the importance of enlisting key faculty in the process as set out in item 4 of this tool kit.

Creating a groundswell of support for new initiatives will bolster your position before the administration. Again it may take a great deal of time and the policies will most likely undergo many revisions as they wind their way through these groups. PDAs should recognize that policy decisions are rarely made simply on the basis of fairness.

The legal and financial implications of new proposals need to be carefully analyzed in order to determine the impact on the institution. One example is that changes of benefits could have tax implications that may affect the institution as well as the individual. This could be as simple as providing tuition reimbursement or health insurance to postdocs with NSRA grants. These benefits are seen as income to the IRS and are thus subject to taxation payable by the postdoc. Other examples include issues such as appointment letters that commit institutional funds can have an effect on the institution's credit rating or the fact that orientation programs must have certain essential elements to meet federal and state safety requirements.

XI. Providing Guidance on Postdocs' Roles and Responsibilities

It is important for the PDA to encourage postdocs to be proactive about their experience. Postdocs who are prepared to openly discuss their expectations, problems and goals with their mentors and other senior colleagues, are more likely to finish their training having had a positive experience. There are three major areas where postdocs have a degree of responsibility: their own professional development, ethical conduct, and grievance issues. It is a good idea for PDAs to be aware of these areas, and to provide resources for incoming postdocs so that they fully understand how to positively direct their own experiences.

Professional Development of the Postdoc

The primary responsibility of postdoctoral scholars is to participate in the research effort of the host institution and at the same time communicate with all participants in their training, including the mentor, the host institution and the financial sponsor. Postdocs will benefit from communicating regularly with their mentors and other colleagues, promoting collaboration with their mentors, and communicating their own perceived training needs. Furthermore, postdocs are in the best position to take responsibility for making decisions about their own career paths, and communicating changes as they occur to their mentors. When postdocs are active participants in their own training, they come to recognize that the primary research advisor cannot provide all the necessary advice and preparation for a successful career. Pursuing alternative sources of mentoring will be helpful to the postdoc. These sources may include the postdoctoral office or association, peers, and other members of the research community. Finally, postdoctoral scholars should strive to gain a sense of responsibility for their own careers, to identify specific jobs in which they are best suited and most interested, and to further direct their own postdoctoral experiences toward fulfilling these goals.

[Adapted from Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers: A Guide for Postdoctoral Scholars, Advisers, Institutions, Funding Organizations, and Disciplinary Societies (2000) – COSEPUP <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309069963/html/>]

At the Second COSEPUP Convocation for Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience (reported in Science's *Next Wave*, at http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/3010/looking_forward_looking_backward/) participants stressed that individual postdocs should take the primary responsibility of directing their own scientific and professional development, with the support of their advisors and institutions. Postdocs should have a written plan for their careers, personal development, and scientific progress. This plan should be flexible, and assessed on a regular basis by postdocs and their mentors. Every six months or annually is a reasonable goal to aim for, but time shouldn't be the limiting factor. For example, if a scientific project is not working and taking up more of your time than would otherwise be necessary, this is a time to take a step back and re-evaluate goals.

With the aim of providing postdocs with a model program, FASEB outlined an Individual Development Plan (<http://www.faseb.org/opa/ppp/educ/idp.html>) for postdocs and postdoc advisors to set goals and metrics in place to ensure productivity in the lab, as well as training for the postdoc. The plan was reviewed in an article in Science's Next Wave (http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/1960/a_career_development_plan_for_postdocs/). The Postdoc Office at UNC-Chapel Hill has a downloadable self-assessment exercise, which postdocs are asked to complete on a yearly basis (http://www.unc.edu/ops/postdoc_self_assessment_form.doc). The questions asked in this exercise are typical of those issues postdocs should be thinking about on a regular basis throughout their training, and provide a good model for planning professional and career development goals.

Postdoctoral Responsibilities: Professional and Ethical Code of Conduct

Postdocs can position themselves for success by staying current with best policies for ethical and working conduct. This includes all forms of safe working procedures, such as the handling of special materials, conflicts of interest and peer review. Postdocs are encouraged to keep themselves up-to-date with best practices and licensing requirements for these potentially sensitive issues. For example, postdocs funded by the NIH are currently required to attend a institutionally-run bioethics course, and biomedical postdocs will find it is in their best interests to take such a course. A comprehensive guide to bioethical issues can be found on the NIH website at <http://www.nih.gov/sigs/bioethics/>.

Postdocs working in for-profit institutions or industry will probably have their professional and ethical requirements stipulated to them as part of their hiring agreements. However, Postdoc Associations in non-profit institutions such as universities or hospitals may find it useful to investigate the Internet Nonprofit Center (<http://www.nonprofits.org>), which has good advice and information for non-profit organizations on many different areas of policy, many referring specifically to areas of regulation such as conflicts of interest. A good place to start researching is their FAQ page, which is very well-organized and grouped according to subject material (<http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/>).

Responsibilities for Conflicts and Grievance Procedures

During their training, postdocs are likely to interact with a wide variety of people, each with his or her own set of personality traits and manner of accomplishing things. In general, everybody gets along. However, this is unfortunately not always the case. Occasionally, postdocs may feel that they have been unfairly treated, either by their mentors, or by someone else within their departments or institutions. This could be with respect to a number of potential subjects including projects, funding, or more personal issues.

The best way for postdocs to handle this situation is to address this directly with their antagonists, before any direct conflicts have arisen. This approach is designed to avoid magnifying misunderstandings. This is particularly true if a postdoc's antagonist also happens to

be his or her mentor. Only if a resolution cannot be reached, or the other person is unable or unwilling to reach a resolution, should postdocs consider initiating grievance procedures.

PDAs can offer information and advice for individual postdocs on how to initiate a grievance procedure, and also when it is justifiable to do so. Science's Next Wave has a number of very useful articles for postdocs on the how, when and why of resolving conflicts:

Butting Heads: Conflict Resolution for Postdocs, Part I

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0910/butting_heads_conflict_resolution_for_postdocs_part_i/

Butting Heads: Conflict Resolution for Postdocs, Part II

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0980/butting_heads_conflict_resolution_for_postdocs_part_ii/

What to Do When Your Advisor Goes Too Far, Part I

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0000/what_to_do_when_your_advisor_goes_too_far_part_i/

What to Do When Your Advisor Goes Too Far, Part II

http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0000/what_to_do_when_your_advisor_goes_too_far_part_ii/

XII. Developing a Postdoctoral Fellows Handbook

Informing new postdocs about their institute's resources is one of the most important roles of a postdoctoral association, including general information about what being a postdoc means as well as specific issues at each institution. Perhaps the best approach is creating a postdoctoral scholar handbook, which several institutions have done with great success. Since each institution is different, and has a different level of organization, it is impossible to compile one handbook that would apply to all postdocs everywhere. However, it is possible to identify key components of any good handbook, and to use feedback from postdocs at your institution to identify additional areas that need to be addressed.

Links to examples of postdoc handbooks are provided in this section, and can be used to serve as guides to those seeking to create handbooks for postdocs at their institutions.

In general, a good handbook should contain the following sections:

- **Classification of postdocs at the institution.** This may vary depending on source of funding, and may have important ramifications regarding benefits and taxes.
- **Services for international postdocs.** International postdocs face all the issues of domestic postdocs, with many additional concerns. They should be made aware of what resources are in place to help them, and how to access them.
- **Employee services.** A guide to employee services, and which of these are available to postdocs, is a valuable resource.
- **Benefits.** Incoming postdocs need to know what benefits they are entitled to, and how benefits differ depending on their classification status.
- **Postdoctoral policies.** Many postdocs are unaware of the policies governing them until they find themselves in unfortunate situations. A formal policy regarding postdocs should be included in the handbook so that postdocs have a clear understanding of their role in the institute. An official policy should be a part of any institution with a significant postdoc population and serves the interest of all parties.
- **General institution information.** Postdocs commonly arrive with little knowledge of the institution beyond what happens in their mentors' labs. Information about other departments, resources, core facilities, and the availability of free or discounted tuition can help a postdoc establish multi-disciplinary collaborations and foster independence.
- **Quality of life information.** This can include information on transportation, housing, parking, spousal programs, day care, banking and a myriad of other topics that are encountered on a daily basis but are not adequately addressed in other areas of the handbook.
- **Contact information.** A list of names and contact information saves postdocs a lot of time and effort, especially newly-arrived postdocs who have not had time to develop a network. It helps to know that there are people on site who are willing and able to provide guidance.

Links to Postdoctoral Fellows Handbooks

The following institutions have handbooks that are excellent models for those wishing to create a handbook for their institution or improve on an existing version:

[Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center](#)

[Stanford University](#)

[University of Calgary](#)

[University of California at San Francisco](#)

XIII. Leadership, Negotiation, & Communication

Playing a role in the set up of a postdoctoral association requires not only a substantial amount of your time, but also the acquisition of a different skill set in order for you to successfully maintain a productive association. These skills include communication, leadership, negotiation, and general management skills. This might seem a daunting task, but realizing how beneficial these skills can be for your future career will certainly make you understand how important it is to become more experienced in these areas. Consider an article written by Emily Klotz, published by Science NextWave, entitled “Developing the Skills You Need To Succeed: Tales From Association Postdocs”

(http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/issue/nextwave/0980/developing_the_skills_you_need_to_succeed_tales_from_association_postdocs_part_2/)

Emily provides an encouraging and enthusiastic review of the long-term benefits of skill development acquired from becoming involved in the Postdoctoral Association of your institution.

So how do you find out some basic information on these various non-bench related skills? One way is to take a free online self-assessment survey to determine where your strengths and weaknesses lie – go to www.queendom.com and browse the surveys list.

Leadership Skills

For more information on developing leadership skills, try www.johnbaldoni.com where a multitude of articles on leadership skills can be found. This consulting firm is led by John Baldoni who has recently published a book called “Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders”. A particularly concise article depicting the five essential qualities of a successful leader can be found at www.leader-values.com, written by Angelo C. Valenti. Placed in the Themes – Leadership section of the website, this article is nestled amongst some other interesting pieces you may want to browse. If you are wondering how to accomplish such a mammoth task on your own, become inspired by reading an article written by Warren Bennis published on the Leader to Leader website – <http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/121/winter97/bennis.html> describing the beauty of successful teamwork and the leadership skills required to cultivate and motivate your team. Lastly, if the above-mentioned articles all seem somewhat biased towards the corporate world, consider the article by Kathy Barker – “Leadership on the Mountain; Lessons for the Lab,” in which Kathy eloquently describes the similarities between successfully managing a scientific team and managing a mountain-climbing expedition. Kathy recommends looking to mountaineering books for inspiration.

One of the most important skills for a PDA leader is cultivating and grooming your successor. Avoid trying to do everything yourself. This makes the PDA dependent upon your individual

leadership. What is going to happen to the PDA when you move on? Always be on the look-out for promising new activists who you can mentor to become your eventual replacement.

Negotiation Skills

To start with, read the book entitled “Getting to Yes” by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. This book was first published in 1981 and has sold over a million copies. Based on the art of “Principled Negotiation,” this book is a step-by-step guide to successful negotiation. After reading this you will find that you can apply your newly acquired skill set to a wide variety of situations, from negotiating funding for your postdoc association to negotiating a great deal on your new car. A wealth of information can be found at www.negotiationskills.com. Choose from a variety of articles. For some simple, friendly advice on honing your negotiation skills, check out the Personal Development section of www.bizhelp24.com. This site contains articles on various other aspects of personal development including overall management skills.

Communication Skills

A simple Internet search reveals a dizzying display of articles and sites describing all aspects of successful communication. It is hard to know where to begin. However, a great resource is a Reading University (U.K.) web site detailing content of a class on scientific communication skills www.met.rdg.ac.uk/cag/courses/MTMG05/. From here you can browse several interesting articles. There are also many books to be found on the subject of successful communication – try “Essential Communication Strategies: For Scientists, Engineers, and Technology Professionals”, by Herbert Hirsch.

Workshops

A great way to obtain practical help is to attend a workshop. Many institutions, especially those with currently existing postdoctoral associations, are very active in providing additional training to their postdoc community. For example, Caltech’s Postdoc Association presents a “Personal Excellence Series”, in which they provide a number of workshops on various topics including a recently organized workshop entitled, “Transferrable Skills Workshop” for undergraduates and postdocs. The Counseling and Postdoctoral Service Department at Scripps Research Institute also present various workshops of interest.. It is worth checking with any professional development office that your institution has to see if they organize any workshops or seminars. Once you have helped your institution to establish a PDA you may want to consider initiating a seminar series on various aspects of career development, including how to obtain leadership, communication and negotiation skills. These are generally well-attended, popular events. Although it will come at a price, there are many professional companies, including consulting companies that run seminars or will run a workshop for you at your institution. Check out www.advanceconsulting.com or www.scarecrowworkshops.com for more information on specific workshops. The NPA also offers workshops at its annual meeting that are specifically intended to assist PDA leaders in building and sustaining successful PDAs.

Seek Advice from Colleagues

Ask for advice on enhancing your skills from people whose leadership skills you admire. Pay attention to their speaking style and interpersonal communication strategies, and ask them to suggest reading material or other resources. Approach those who are more senior and experienced than you for advice about effective strategies and tactics for getting what you want for your PDA. Chances are, they will have had a similar experience from which you can gain invaluable information to develop and maintain a successful PDA.

XIV. Time Management

Now that you have committed a significant portion of your time to establishing and maintaining your PDA, how do you find the time to perform both duties in the lab and tasks associated with the PDA? Perhaps you are already juggling a career and family. For many postdocs managing their time effectively is a big concern. This section aims to help you with the basics of time management. Although we obviously cannot control the passage of time, we can however control how we utilize this time in order to help us achieve our personal and professional goals.

The advantages of effective time management?

1. Provides a sense of achievement and peace of mind
2. Sustains motivation
3. Reduces stress
4. Gain more time!

The keys to successful time management are actually very simple – goal setting and assertiveness.

Goal Setting

Before you can set yourself goals, you need to have a good degree of self-knowledge. This helps you set both long-term and short-term goals, and most importantly, helps you **PRIORITIZE**. By setting priorities you will eliminate the not-so-important things in life that can wait, such as checking your email for the tenth time during the same morning. To help set priorities, consider what direction you would like your career to move in. If, like many postdocs, you are committed to gaining a faculty position, then you will realize that a good publication record and evidence of securing funding is vital to your career. If, on the other hand, you are fed up with academia and are looking for a career change such as patent law, then dedicating time to investigating the requirements for such a move will be high priority. Only YOU can decide how important each of your responsibilities is to you, and how much time needs to be devoted to them.

The best way to start setting your goals is to write them down in order of longer-term goals first. If you are thinking of financial goals, then think about thirty years from now! In terms of your career, or aspects of PDA advancement, perhaps five years from now is realistic. Then start writing down goals for the shorter term, such as three years, two years, one year, six months, three months and one month. Each list will follow on from the previous. Some tips to remember when compiling your goal lists:

1. be as precise as possible - date, time, etc
2. be positive – master a new technique, rather than perform an old one without making a mistake
3. be realistic - is your work really going to make it to Nature?!
4. base your goals on performance, not on outcome – if your work gets “scooped”, and your publication has to go to a lesser-tier journal, this doesn’t mean that your quality of work was any worse

5. set priorities – this is key!
6. Pay attention to deadlines

In addition to your lists of long and short term goals, you will also have goals that are ongoing, for example, preparing for the regular PDA meeting.

In addition to writing down all your goals with priority assigned, you should also to create a daily To-Do List. It is helpful to do this the night before, or first thing in the morning whilst drinking your cup of coffee. Keep it short if you can, five or six of the most important items are probably as much as most people can integrate into their regular daily work schedule. It will help you organize your day better, and as you check off the completed items it will help you recognize what you DID achieve today rather than have you focus on what you didn't achieve.

A great way to stay focused on your priorities is to create a list of URGENT/IMPORTANT tasks, as suggested in Steven Covey's book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People". Below is a sample list of tasks and their assigned importance:

URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT: e.g. Ringing phone, Incoming email

URGENT AND IMPORTANT: e.g. Lab flood, tomorrow's grant deadline

IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT: e.g. Ongoing experiments, preparing for next committee meeting

NOT IMPORTANT AND NOT URGENT: e.g. Most emails, weekend social activities

Try to spend as little time as possible completing the urgent but not important tasks. For many people the urgent and important tasks are incredibly stressful situations and so for best results try to allocate the majority of your time to completing IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT tasks.

Assertiveness

The principle is very straightforward – LEARN TO SAY NO, both to yourself and to others. This is something that many people struggle with. Stick to your priorities. Just as someone on a diet can say no to a doughnut but eat carrots instead, you can say no to replying to personal emails when you could be writing the methods section for your upcoming publication. And if you have a grant deadline in ten days, it is not a good idea to agree to help a colleague complete an experiment when there are other people who could assist just as easily. Keep yourself on track by learning to accept your time limitations.

How to Utilize Time Management Skills to Successfully Maintain your PDA

Whether you are running the show, or simply volunteering a small amount of time, the above skills can be incorporated into your routine to aid you in achieving your goals within the PDA.

SET REALISTIC GOALS. This is probably the most important. If you are establishing a brand new PDA, don't expect it to be up and running overnight. This is a mammoth task that takes

a lot of time. Set realistic deadlines – AND PRIORITIZE. For example, gaining faculty and administrative support for your association needs to be achieved before you can start advocating for any policy changes.

DELEGATE TASKS. This is all part of being assertive. Know where your limits are and learn how to say no. Others may be just as capable as you of completing the task at hand and may even be more qualified. Perhaps among the PDA volunteers there is someone who has good financial knowledge or is very business savvy – if so, they would be the perfect person to ask to draft up a budget for the PDA and they would probably be very flattered that you asked.

Gadgets to keep you organized

There are a number of tools available that are helpful in managing your time. There is nothing wrong with the \$2 notebook from the local store, in fact, keeping a pad and paper handy at all times is a great way to ensure you never forget anything. However, if you are looking for a more sophisticated method of setting your goals and charting your progress, there are many software packages that exist to do just that. Or perhaps you might want to consider investing in a hand-held Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). For many, a large diary or yearbook is sufficient. Whatever the preferred tool, make it work for you.

Links to additional sites of interest and other resources:

An excellent read is “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, by Steven Covey. This can be found in most retail book stores. A good summary of this book is found at this web site: www.quickmba.com

The following article describing [The Pickle Jar Theory](#) is easy to read and the theory very simple – gives a whole new meaning to Time Management!

www.mindtools.com has some great information concerning all aspects of Time Management.

Looking for some [inspirational quotes](#) to pin up next to your desk?

Also remember to look into seminars offered by a career development or research and training office at your institution. Time Management is usually a popular topic. Many professional societies run workshops at their annual meetings, and Time Management may be a topic covered.

XV. Networking with PDA Leaders Nationwide

Postdocs understand the value of networking to their careers but don't always have time or opportunities to interact with other postdocs outside of their immediate research programs. For postdoc association leaders, the value of networking extends beyond their own careers to include benefits for both their PDA and its constituent postdocs. PDAs around the country have used a myriad of strategies to affect changes at the local level, while also providing essential support for postdocs. Why reinvent the wheel at your institution when there is an established network of PDA leaders (both current and former) who are happy to share information and provide advice. There are a number of ways that PDA leaders and representatives can introduce themselves and to seek counsel:

- The [NPA Institutional Policy Database](#) includes contact information for many postdoc associations and offices that have formal policies on postdoctoral affairs.
- The listing of [NPA Sustaining Members](#) provides direct web links to all PDAs that are members of the NPA.
- The [NPA Annual Meeting](#) is a wonderful gathering of postdoc leaders from around the country, with workshops and sessions specifically designed to help PDAs achieve their goals. Bring business cards with you. Ask your PDA administrative liaison, PI, or department how you can order business cards through your institute. This is a great networking tool for all other aspects of your career as well.
- Be aware of any special events at your own institution, for example, the Data and Dine event held annually at Penn State University, hosted by the Office of Professional Development, is the perfect opportunity to network with other postdocs, faculty, and administrators.
- The Postdoc Network (PDN) of Science's Next Wave also provides direct links to many PDAs and postdoc offices on its website. The PDN also maintains an e-mail list-serve that you can subscribe to. This is an excellent vehicle for posing questions about how other PDAs have tackled issues that are a challenge at your home institution. PDA leaders have also contributed numerous articles to the PDN on how they approached various problems and arrived at solutions. These are available in the PDN archives.
- The Postdoc Network (PDN) of Science's Next Wave also provides direct links to many PDAs and postdoc offices on its website. The PDN also maintains an e-mail list-serve that you can subscribe to. This is an excellent vehicle for posing questions about how other PDAs have tackled issues that are a challenge at your home institution. PDA leaders have also contributed numerous articles to the PDN on how they approached various problems and arrived at solutions. These are available in the PDN archives.

General Resources on Networking

There are literally thousands of articles, guidebooks and workshops designed to help people make effective use of networking opportunities. These can be found on the internet and your nearest library. A good source of resources for scientists on the art of networking is Science's Next Wave. A search for the term "networking" yields over 12,000 results.

XVI. Links and References

[How to Form a Postdoc Association](#). Prepared by leaders of PDAs across the U.S., this article provides a concise step-by-step guide to planning and forming a PDA. (PDN 10 November 2000)

[Learning From Experience: Postdoc Associations Share Their Wisdom on Getting Started and Forging Ahead](#). This Q&A is adapted from a presentation given at the GREAT meeting in 2000 by the founder of the NIEHS postdoc association. Topics covered include: identifying postdocs, conducting surveys, organizational structure, recruitment, and leadership transition. (PDN 19 January 2001)

[One for all and all for one: Creation of the University of California Postdoctoral Council](#). Discusses the benefits and pitfalls of establishing a system-wide PDA at a large academic institution with postdocs at multiple campuses. (PDN 5 April 2002)

[The UNC-PDA organizes itself to assure momentum, continuity, and success](#). Provides an overview of the early strategies and programs adopted by the UNC-PDA, including the role of administrators, the formation of committees, planning for career development workshops, and structural issues. (PDN 21 September 2001)

[History and Evolution of the Stanford University Postdoc Association](#). Provides background on how the role of the Stanford PDA has changed since its inception in 1995. Discusses leadership transition issues, obtaining institutional support, and the challenge of engaging postdocs in the ongoing work of the PDA. (PDN 18 May 2001)

[Establishing a Postdoctoral Association at Brown University](#). Discusses how an informal postdoc breakfast club for neuroscientists evolved in to a more formal campus-wide PDA. The process and results of the first Brown postdoc survey are included. (PDN 02 February 2001)

[The Ongoing Challenges of the UCSF Postdoc Association](#). This article provides guidance on how a well-established PDA can ensure its continued success by addressing issues of leadership succession and institutional memory. The value of working with administrators is also discussed. (PDN 17 November 2000)

Appendix 1: National Cancer Institute PDA Bylaws

By-Laws for the Fellows and Young Investigators Association

Mission

- To support and advocate for postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows, and young investigators at the NCI in all aspects of their professional research training and career development.
- To strive to promote interaction among CCR postdoctoral members on an academic, social and cultural basis, while also assisting the CCR Office of the Director in this endeavor.
- To act as a liaison between the CCR Office of the Director, the CCR Office of Training and Education, and the postdoctoral population at large and represent the interests of postdoctoral trainees to the NCI and the CCR.

General

- A. These by-laws are effective on June 28, 2002
- B. Each current member of the CCR- Fellows and Young Investigator (FYI) Steering Committee (SC) must be familiar with these by-laws and agree that their activities as members are bound by them.

Membership

Current

- A. NCI CCR postdoctoral Fellows, Clinical Fellows and Young Investigators that are currently in mentored training positions are members of the CCR-FYI. Any member may volunteer to serve on the CCR-FYI Steering Committee (SC). Fellows and young investigators from other institutes, upon prior approval of the SC, may become members of the CCR-FYI. Funding to attend retreats or other CCR-FYI sponsored events will be the responsibility of the individual's institute.
- B. The Fellow and Young Investigators Steering Committee (FYISC) shall be the legislative and executive body of the CCR-FYI, subject to the controls vested by these by-laws.
- C. Current SC members should volunteer to be active members in at least one Sub-Committee and are expected to assist in the annual CCR-FYI retreat. Upon accepting membership in a Sub-Committee, individuals agree to maintain active membership for a minimum of one year. Each regular member will have one vote in all voting matters of the Sub-Committee.
- D. Members will attain voting status upon completing four months as an SC member.

Alumni

Alumni CCR-FYI members and tenure track researchers can participate in meetings and decision-making, but only in an advisory capacity.

Ad-hoc members

CCR/ Office of the Director (OD), CCR/ Office of Training and Education (OTE)

- A. Designated representatives from each office will serve in an advisory capacity to the SC and, as such, will not have a vote in voting matters of the SC or any Sub-Committee.
- B. At least one representative from each office may attend the meetings of the SC or any Sub-Committee meeting.
- C. The CCR/OD will provide administrative support to the SC as appropriate.

Organization and Responsibilities

Elected Executive Members

All current Steering Committee members with at least one year active membership are eligible for nomination to any of the elected membership positions. Elected members shall hold their position for 1 year.

Duties of Chair

- A. Maintain one- and five-year plan for the SC. This plan will be a detailed vision of the goals and activities for the SC for the pursuant one and five-year periods.
- B. Organize and manage meetings, including writing the agenda. Distribute meeting agendas to CCR-FYI via the CCR-postdocs listserv and CCR-SC listserv.
- C. Open the annual CCR-FYI retreat, and ensure the success thereof.
- D. Act as the point of contact for personnel wishing to contact the committee.

- E. Maintain regular contact with staff of CCR/OD.
- F. Represent the CCR-FYI at campus activities (or designate another SC member).
- G. Represent the CCR-FYI at the monthly Intramural Advisory Board Meeting as a non-voting member.
- H. Will continue to serve on the SC for one year following tenure as Chair in the capacity of an ex-officio member to advise and ensure continuity of SC leadership.

Duties of Vice-Chair

- A. Assume duties of Chair in his or her absence and oversee those activities as delegated by the Chair.
- B. Assume the duties of the Secretary at monthly meetings in his or her absence.
- C. Serve as the liaisons to postdoctoral associations and other organizations.
- D. Deliver a semi-annual report to the SC detailing the activities and plans of the SC. The report will include completed business, ongoing business, plans for the pursuant six months, requested action items, an updated roster of the SC membership, and addenda as needed. This report should be made available to all members of the CCR-FYI, through e-mail and the website.
- E. Attend FELCOM meetings, as a non-voting member, in the absence of the officially designated FELCOM representative of the SC.

Duties of Secretary

- A. Produce meeting summaries and ensuring that information from CCR-FYI SC meetings is communicated to all postdocs. This includes, but is not limited to: posting the meeting minutes on the website, and sending minutes by e-mail. They shall be considered part of the public record and may be inspected by any member of the CCR-FYI.
- B. Maintain list of SC members and sub-committee members and distribute member list to the SC with the monthly meeting agenda.
- C. Responsible for tracking CCR-FYI SC monthly meeting attendance and communicating with members regarding unexcused absences.
- D. Responsible for the distribution of the by-laws to all new members of the SC.
- E. Assume the duties of the Chair or Vice Chair in his or her absence.

Current Members of the Steering Committee

- A. Current SC members are appointed by volunteering to participate on the CCR-FYI SC and must attend the scheduled monthly meetings of the SC.
- B. Upon accepting membership in the FYI Steering Committee, individuals agree to maintain active membership for a minimum of one year.
- C. Be a member of at least one sub-committee.
- D. Assist in dissemination of pertinent information to the postdoctoral population at large.
- E. Communicate concerns to the SC from postdoctoral fellows, clinical fellows and young investigators.
- F. Hold informal meetings with postdoctoral fellows as necessary.
- G. The CCR-FYI SC will strive to maintain diversity and equal representation among scientific discipline, experience, gender, and foreign national status.

Duties of the CCR/OD and OTE

- A. Advise the SC of relevant issues related to NCI and CCR policy, national science policy, and educational policy.
- B. Advise the SC on the priorities and goals of the CCR and the NCI.
- C. Provide support for special events as necessary.

Election of Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary

- A. The call for nominations will be issued to the SC members at the first meeting after the yearly retreat. Nominations will be presented to all CCR-FYI members via public email. Members of FYI with general opinions on nominees should attend the following SC meeting to present their comments. The final nominations will be orally presented at the second meeting after yearly retreat.
- B. At the third meeting after the retreat, the SC will hold three separate elections for Chair, vice chair, and secretary, if one or more of the positions does not have a nominee, elections will be held by popular vote.

- C. The SC voting shall be by secret ballot, collected and counted by the current chair. Elected chair, vice chair, and secretaries will be announced to general FYI members via email.
- D. Chair and vice-chair will serve for a period of one year.

Conduct of meetings

General

- A. The regular meetings of the Steering Committee shall be held on the last Thursday of every month at 12 p.m. in a location to be announced. Any change in time or location must be agreed upon at the previous meeting and approved by a majority of members present at that meeting.
- B. Meetings will abide by the by-laws of the CCR-FYI and will be scheduled for one hour. No meeting of the Steering committee shall exceed two hours in length except by a simple majority vote. If the meeting is to be extended, it shall be extended in half-hour increments. Unfinished business will be relegated to the next meeting.
- C. Quorum is more than one-half of the active membership of the SC. A quorum shall be necessary to vote on proposed motions and to amend the by-laws of the Steering Committee. If a quorum is not present, motions may be voted on electronically, if approved by a majority of the members present.
- D. Voting Motions shall carry if they receive a majority vote. All regular members present may vote. Electronic votes shall be carried out by the Chair within a limited time frame.

Attendance

- A. Attendance will be taken at each meeting. To remain in good standing, members must attend all scheduled monthly meetings. Members that are not able to attend a meeting must notify the Chair via e-mail or by telephone.
- B. Excused absences should be coordinated with the Chair 24 hrs in advance. Excused absences include but are not limited to emergencies, annual, sick, or maternity leave, attendance at scientific meetings, or patient care, and are at the discretion of the chair. Excused absences will not be considered as a missed meeting. However, no more than 3 successive excused absences will be permitted.
- C. If a member has one unexcused absence, he or she will be notified in writing by the administrative secretary that they are no longer in good standing. Two unexcused absences will result in immediate dismissal from the Steering Committee. After dismissal, a member may not be reinstated for at least a period of one year.
- D. Members of the postdoctoral community are invited to attend and speak at all meetings but are not eligible to vote unless they are members of the CCR-FYI SC.

Order of Business

- A. An agenda of all scheduled meetings will be distributed in advance to all CCR-FYI members via CCR-postdocs listserv. Agenda items should be sent to the Chair at least one week before the meeting to allow time for inclusion in the formal agenda. Any SC members can recommend additional agenda items.
- B. The Chair shall call the meeting to order. The secretary will take attendance.
- C. Approval of minutes. A copy of the previous meetings' minutes will be sent by e-mail to all CCR-FYI members and posted on the CCR-FYI website. The Chair will announce any changes at the meeting.
- D. Reports. The Chairperson shall call only on those SC members who have reports to make. Any such request should be made to the Chair at least one week in advance of the meeting.
- E. Unfinished business. Items to be considered under this heading include:
 - 1. Any question that was pending when the previous meeting adjourned.
 - 2. Any question which was to be considered at the previous meeting but was postponed for debate.
- F. New business. The Chair shall ask if there is any new business. Any current voting SC member can introduce new business or remove from the table any matter that is on the table.
- G. Announcements. The Chairperson may make, or call upon others to make any necessary announcements; or, any SC member may briefly obtain the floor for such a purpose.
- H. Adjournment.

Sub-Committees

- A. Sub-committees shall be created to investigate and recommend action on matters, which concern the CCR-FYI.

- B. The Sub-Committees will be comprised of volunteers from the CCR-FYI SC membership. The duties of a sub-committee and its power to act on certain decisions shall be outlined at its formation and shall be approved by the CCR-FYI SC.
- C. All sub-committees should report during the monthly meeting of the CCR-FYI SC, but are not required to if there is no news.
- D. Standing Sub-Committees will be established to consider continuing questions and projects. As part of their duties, all voting members of the CCR-FYI SC must also be a member of at least one of the standing Sub-Committee. Additional standing Sub-Committees may be proposed by any SC member, but must be voted into existence by majority vote. Each Sub-Committee shall elect a chair from their membership.
- E. Ad hoc Sub-Committees shall be created as the need arises to perform a specific task (e.g. surveys, events)
 - 1. Established for the purpose of examining questions for which no appropriate standing Sub-Committee exists, as determined by the SC.
 - 2. At its formation, the ad hoc Sub-Committee shall be given a specific period of time to complete its task as determined by the SC.
 - 3. If the ad hoc Sub-Committee cannot complete the task within the appointed time, the Chair may consider extending the appointment time or dissolving the Sub-Committee with the approval of the CCR-FYI SC membership.

I. Retreat

- 1. Responsible for planning the annual CCR-FYI retreat. However, all CCR-FYI SC members are expected to assist with the retreat.
- 2. Work with the administrative support personnel (including outside contractors) to determine the location for the retreat, the dates, and the schedule for events that need to be completed prior to the retreat.
- 3. Produce the schedule for the retreat. This schedule must be approved by a simple majority of SC members at a regular CCR-FYI SC meeting.
- 4. Generate a list of potential invited speakers. Any SC member may make suggestions for speakers.
- 5. Invite speakers for the CCR-FYI retreat, assign CCR-FYI SC members to each speaker to act as a host, and organize volunteers to introduce each speaker.
- 6. Organize publicity for the Retreat with the Publicity Sub-Committee.
- 7. Generate a list of abstract categories and criteria for judging abstracts.
- 8. Organize volunteers to judge abstracts, and to moderate the Oral Presentation sessions.
- 9. Distribute abstracts to the judges, and organize the scores.
- 10. All financial support for the retreat comes from the CCR/OD. Spending is approved by the CCR/OTE.

II. Publicity / Social

- 1. Newsletter. Responsible for writing, editing, and producing a newsletter for postdoctoral fellows and young investigators at NCI that will be published every 3 months.
- 2. Website. Develop and maintain CCR-FYI website.
- 3. Contact all other Sub-Committee chairs, appropriate members of the administration and any other persons deemed appropriate to obtain a brief account of activities, campus developments and issues to be published in newsletter and website.
- 4. Organize social events.
- 5. Work closely with the Chair of the SC to report regularly on system-wide and statewide issues that impact the postdoctoral population. Assist, upon request of the CCR-FYI SC, with the issuance of public, campus-wide, system-wide, and statewide public relations activities.

III. Community Life

- 1. Handbook. This will be generated in conjunction with TFO. Members of this Sub-Committee will be responsible for suggesting new items to be included in the Handbook, and for reviewing the handbook on a yearly basis to ensure that it remains up-to-date.
- 2. Guide Docs. This program will be administered by members of the Sub-Committee. They will be responsible for advertising the program, managing the volunteers, and matching volunteer Guide

Docs with new CCR- FYI postdoctoral and clinical fellows. They will also be responsible for advertising the CCR-postdocs listserv to all incoming fellows and trainees.

IV. By-Laws/Policy

1. Members of the By-laws committee will meet every six months to update and revise the by-laws. They will also be responsible for making amendments as necessary.
2. All proposed changes will be discussed and approved by the majority of members of the by-laws Sub-Committee.
3. The by-laws Sub-Committee shall consist of at least 3 individuals who shall volunteer to serve on the committee at the first CCR-FYI SC meeting of the calendar year.

V. Scientific

1. Responsible for CCR Fellows seminar series.
2. Responsible for updating and distributing a scientific survey at annual CCR-FYI retreat and reporting the survey results of the previous year.
3. Responsible for presenting the results of the scientific survey to the Intramural Advisory Board, Principle Investigators, and Fellows and posting it on the CCR-FYI web site.

Amendments

A. REVIEW OF THE BY-LAWS

1. The SC shall review the by-laws at least annually to ensure that they remain current.
 2. The Chair of the Sub-Committee will announce the review period to SC members to allow input from all members. The review period shall be at least 10 days in length.
 3. Proposed changes to the by-laws will be sent to the by-laws Sub-committee, where they will be written, and then submitted to the SC for approval.
 4. Proposed changes to the by-laws can be made at any time following discussion at a regularly scheduled SC meeting pending the vote of the SC membership.
 5. Proposed changes should be submitted in writing to the Chair and presented for discussion at the next scheduled SC meeting.
- B. All proposed amendments to the CCR-FYI by-laws shall be publicly posted at least one week in advance of the CCR-FYI SC meeting at which they are to be considered. Public posting shall include, but is not necessarily limited to, posting on the CCR-FYI web site.
- C. A majority vote by SC members is required to pass the amendment onto the By-law sub-committee for further discussion and changes.
- D. A 2/3 vote of a quorum of members is required for the amendment to be attached (or otherwise included in) the by-laws.
- E. Distribute updated by-laws to all CCR-FYI members.

List of abbreviations:

CCR: Center for Cancer Research

FYI: Fellows and Young Investigators Association

SC: Steering Committee

OD: Office of Director

OTE: Office of Training and Education

Appendix 2: Stanford PDA bylaws

Stanford University Postdocs Association (SUPD) Charter

I. MISSION

- A. The Stanford University Postdoc Association (SUPD) was founded in 1998 to promote the building of community among the approximately 1200 postdoctoral fellows at Stanford University. The SUPD consists of two separate committees: the PAC and the Social Committee.
- B. The SUPD-Postdoc Advocacy Committee (SUPD-PAC) was formed in the spring of 1999 and is focused on addressing serious issues facing postdocs at Stanford. The goal of the SUPD-PAC is to improve conditions for Postdoctoral Fellows at Stanford by working with Administration and Faculty.
- C. Primary goals of the PAC include the following:
 - 1) Develop strategies to increase postdoctoral salaries and benefits to levels commensurate with the NIH salary scale and the high cost of living in the Bay Area
 - 2) Clearly define the employment status of Postdoctoral Fellows at an institutional level. Currently postdocs fall into a gray area that is neither student nor employee.
 - 3) Clarify and improve institutional conflict resolution guidelines for disputes concerning Postdoctoral Fellows.
- D. The members of the PAC will act as a liaison to the postdoctoral population at large and represent postdocs' interests to the Office of Student Affairs and to Stanford University.
- E. The Social Committee aims to foster social and professional interactions among postdocs from all across the university. The committee will organize parties, hikes, picnics and other social events.

II. MEMBERSHIP

- A. All postdoctoral fellows, defined as individuals carrying a Ph.D. or M.D. degree and conducting research under a Stanford faculty member's supervision, including but not limited to postdocs with the titles of non-matriculated graduate student, research associate, and visiting scholar, are recognized as members of the SUPD and as such are eligible for membership on the PAC.
- B. The PAC will be comprised of a maximum of 20 members.
- C. An open call for additional members can be held at any time the total number of members falls below 20.

III. ORGANIZATION

- A. Regular Members
 - 1. The PAC will strive to maintain diversity and equal representation among scientific discipline, experience, gender, and foreign national status.
 - 2. Regular members are appointed by volunteering to participate on the PAC and attending at least two meetings in a four month period.
 - 3. If the PAC has more volunteers than open slots, new members will be selected by a majority vote of the active members in attendance with consideration given to the current needs of the PAC.
 - 4. Upon accepting membership in the PAC, individuals agree to maintain active membership for a minimum of one year.
- B. Co-chairs of the PAC
 - 1. Two co-chairs will be chosen among volunteers from the existing PAC membership.
 - 2. One co-chair must be employed in a lab at the medical school, and the other must be employed outside of the medical school.
 - 3. If more than two individuals volunteer, two co-chairs will be selected by a majority vote of the active members in attendance.
 - 4. Each co-chair will serve in that position for a minimum of 12 months.
 - 5. At least one co-chair person must be available to attend each PAC meeting.
 - 6. Co-chairs will be responsible for setting the agenda of each meeting and facilitating the meetings.
- C. Additional Officers

1. The posts of Treasurer, Secretary, Webmaster, and Email List Manager will be chosen from among the PAC membership. If more than one individual volunteers, the committee will vote on each office.
2. As postdoc representation on University-wide and Medical School committees is attained, the positions will be advertised to all postdocs and then selected by majority vote of all postdocs in attendance at an advertised PAC meeting.
3. All posts will be held for a minimum of one year.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Social Committee

1. The Social Committee has an open membership policy and will select its own leadership.
2. The Social Committee will be encouraged to send a representative to all PAC meetings to facilitate exchanging information.

B. PAC Co-chairs will be responsible for the following:

1. Scheduling the monthly meetings.
2. Serving as the primary contact for the Stanford administration.
3. Notification of the PAC membership of vacancies on the PAC.
4. Overseeing the timely appointment and/or election of new members.
5. Co-facilitation of scheduled monthly meetings of the PAC in accordance with the guidelines herein.
6. Maintaining a record of PAC meeting attendance, calling the roll if necessary, and determining if quorum is present.
7. Scheduling and coordinating regular Town Hall meetings open to the entire Stanford community.
8. Serving as the liaisons to postdoc associations at other Universities.

C. Officers of the SUPD

1. Treasurer

- a. The Treasurer is responsible for managing the SUPD budget and will act as a liaison with the Postdoctoral Affairs Office for all financial matters.
- b. The Treasurer will develop the SUPD budget with input from the PAC and the Social Committee.

2. Secretary

- a. Recording minutes at each PAC meeting and Town Hall meeting
- b. Ensuring that information from PAC meetings is communicated to all postdocs. This includes, but is not limited to: posting the meeting minutes on the web site, sending minutes by email, and including minutes in the Postdoc newsletter.

3. Webmaster

The Webmaster will maintain the SUPD web page.

4. Email List Manager

The Email List Manager will maintain the supd-members email list.

D. PAC members

1. Must attend more than half of the scheduled meetings
2. Ensure that pertinent information is disseminated to the postdoctoral population at large
3. Communicate concerns to the PAC from those postdocs that they represent
4. Inform postdocs of special events and help organize as needed.
5. Hold informal meetings with postdocs as necessary.

V. APPOINTMENT

A. Appointments to the PAC are for a minimum of one year. Members must notify the co-chairs 2 months prior to the expiration of their term to allow sufficient time for their replacement. This notification should occur at the time of a scheduled PAC meeting. Members who are unable to complete their term for any reason should immediately notify the co-chairs in writing.

B. Continued Appointment: To remain in good standing, members must attend more than half of the scheduled monthly meetings. Excused absences should be coordinated with the co-chairs and preferably in advance.

1. Excused absences will not be considered a missed meeting.
2. If a member fails to attend 3 meetings in a row, he or she will be notified in writing by the Co-chairs that they are no longer an active member of the PAC.

- C. Resignation of Appointment: If an elected PAC officer is unable or unwilling to complete a full year's appointment for any reason, he or she may resign by informing the remaining officers of his or her intent. Upon resignation, an email will be circulated to the SUPD list requesting nominees for a new appointment. A vote will be taken at the next PAC meeting to elect a new officer for the vacated position.
- D. Termination of Duties: If an elected PAC officer is not fulfilling their duties, or conducts in a way that is detrimental to the mission of the PAC, a meeting of the remaining elected officers will be held to discuss the issue, and the officer may be requested to resign. If the officer does not resign and it is deemed necessary by the remaining officers that he or she should no longer remain in office, a quorum among the officers will be required to terminate the appointment. Upon termination, an email will be circulated to the SUPD list requesting nominees for a new appointment. A vote will be taken at the next PAC meeting to elect a new officer for the vacant position.

VI. CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

A. Time and Place

The regular meetings of the PAC shall be held on the second Wednesday of every month at 6:30 PM, in a location to be announced, unless otherwise determined by the PAC or the co-chairs. Meetings will be scheduled for one and a half hours. Unfinished business will be relegated to the next meeting.

Members of the postdoc community are invited to attend and speak at all meetings but are not eligible to vote unless they are members of the PAC.

B. Quorum

Ten active members of the PAC shall constitute a quorum. A quorum shall be necessary to vote on proposed motions and to amend the PAC's charter.

C. Order of Business

1. Agendas will be distributed in advance of all scheduled meetings
2. Approval of minutes
3. Reports of special representatives and standing committees.
4. General orders or unfinished business.
5. Voting motions shall carry if they receive a majority vote. All members present may vote.
6. Determination of topics for the next meeting's agenda. Additional agenda items can be recommended by any PAC member up to the day prior to the next scheduled meeting. Agenda items can be sent to the PAC co-chairs.

VII. SUBCOMMITTEES

- A. Subcommittees shall be created by the PAC membership, as needed, at the regular monthly meetings to investigate and recommend action on matters which are of interest to or concern the PAC.
- B. The subcommittees will be comprised of volunteers from the PAC membership or additional interested postdocs.
- C. The duties of a subcommittee and its power to act on certain decisions shall be outlined at its formation and shall be approved by the PAC.
- D. There will be two types of subcommittees which may be formed:
 1. Standing subcommittees shall be created to consider matters which will require long-term attention .
 - a. The Subcommittee on Conflict Resolution, which predates this Charter, is considered to be previously created.
 - b. These subcommittees shall be reviewed annually to determine if their continued function is necessary
 2. Ad hoc subcommittees shall be created as the need arises to perform a specific task (e.g. surveys, events)
 - a. At its formation, an ad hoc subcommittee shall be given a specific period of time to complete its task
 - b. It will go out of existence when its task is complete, and it has given a final report to the PAC
 - c. If it cannot complete the task within the appointed time the PAC may consider extending the appointment time or dissolving the subcommittee
 - d. All subcommittees shall report to the group during the monthly PAC meeting. Status reports from subcommittees may also be requested on an ad hoc basis.

VIII. REVIEW

- A. The PAC shall review the Charter by-laws at least annually to ensure that they remain current
- B. Co-chairs will announce the review period to PAC members to allow input from all members
- C. Proposed changes to the by-laws can be made at any time following discussion at a regularly scheduled committee meeting pending the vote of the PAC membership
- D. Proposed changes should be submitted in writing to the co-chairs and presented for discussion at the next scheduled PAC meeting
- E. All proposed changes will be discussed and approved by a majority vote of the PAC members in attendance.

Appendix 3: Advice from other PDAs

Learning From Experience: Postdoc Associations Share Their Wisdom on Getting Started and Forging Ahead

(http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/0770/learning_from_experience_postdoc_associations_share_their_wisdom_on_getting_started_and_forging_ahead)

Trying to start up a new postdoctoral association or keep an existing one going? Have no fear! There are a number of postdoctoral organizations that are alive and well, and happy to share their experiences. During the 2000 GREAT meeting in Savannah, representatives from postdoctoral associations both old and new gathered to discuss their successes and their difficulties, and had this advice to share.

New and fledgling postdoctoral groups had a number of questions to ask the more established associations. Here are new groups' questions and the experienced groups' answers.

Q. How do we get a list of postdocs at our institution?

A.

- * Check with the registrar's office at universities or the office in charge of postdoctoral affairs.
- * Payroll offices may be able to give you a list based on appointment mechanisms and/or job titles.
- * Get information from individual departments--call or contact department chairs or secretaries (if you are lucky, there may be a departmental postdoc association).
- * Check with the office sending out appointment letters to new postdocs--also valuable for obtaining updates for your list.
- * Post flyers and send letters to postdocs and departments asking postdocs to sign up.
- * Have sign-up sheets at every event asking for postdocs' contact info (phone, e-mail address).

Q. What are the major issues of postdocs and how can they be identified?

A. How to identify the issues:

- * Determine what the major issues are at your institution by regular surveys of the postdoc population (survey results also give your association more weight when discussing issues with the administration, as you can state with confidence that you are representing the views of most postdocs). Experienced associations suggest that the surveys be anonymous and that an electronic version was more effective than a paper one. To encourage participation, consider some sort of reward (e.g., a raffle).
- * Have department representatives bring local issues to the postdoc association meetings.
- * Hold town hall meetings (also useful to hand out surveys).
- * Find faculty advocates who stay in touch with the association's representatives and the postdoc population at large. The faculty may be aware of issues that previous postdocs have tried to address.

The major issues as identified by established organizations:

- * Health care
- * Salaries and cost-of-living supplements
- * Campus parking
- * Career development (especially nontraditional careers, grant-writing skills, and teaching experience)
- * Child care
- * Loss of benefits when moving from one funding source to another
- * The need for orientation for new postdocs
- * The special needs of foreign postdocs

A word of advice: Choose your issues wisely!

Pick one or two issues and focus on those until things change for the better. Slowly bring other issues online, as too many issues are distracting and detract from the overall goal of improving the status of

postdocs at your institution. It is better to do a few things well than to try to do everything and accomplish nothing.

Q. How do you launch a postdoc organization?

A.

- * Start small, maybe even at the departmental level.
- * Identify a core active group of postdocs.
- * Identify a few attainable goals to ensure some initial positive results. (This will help you maintain postdocs' enthusiasm for the organization.)
- * Find faculty advocates who will help you navigate the administrative issues.
- * Distribute a newsletter annually (or more often) advertising your accomplishments. (This is also a great tool for recruiting new members.)
- * Develop a Web site if possible, as it is a good way to communicate with your members. Be sure to include central contact information and announcements of events and successes.
- * Generate an orientation handbook, in either electronic or paper form (useful content to add to your Web site).
- * Have postdocs from your organization join departmental and institutional committees, but only if you have enough members to follow through. It can leave a bad impression if the association volunteers to help out and then cannot.

Q. What is the organizational structure of your postdoctoral association?

A. The organizational structure varies, depending on what will work best in your institution. A number of more established groups [at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), Stanford University, and the University of California, San Francisco] have formal structures--a steering committee that may include a chair/president, a vice president/vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. However, be flexible--you can always change the structure, as did the organization at the University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. They started with a formal structure, but abolished the steering committee when this didn't work.

Successful organizations have access to money, but may or may not have money that is officially allocated to the organization. At NIH and NIEHS, there are no formal budgets, but money is available from several sources.

Q. How do you increase postdoc participation in association and association-sponsored events?

A.

- * Use incentives at events (food works well!) if you have the financial support to do so.
- * Offer events early in the life of the association that have a big draw--job fairs, career development discussions, and workshops on grant writing and creating a CV.
- * Do surveys to increase visibility.
- * Use Web sites and listservs to increase communication.
- * Use town hall meetings to collect information and allow postdocs to air their problems.
- * Contact faculty advocates who will encourage their postdocs to participate.
- * Be sure to clearly advertise that events are organized and/or sponsored by your postdoc association.
- * Match members to their interests--get computer-literate people to build a Web site; artists to design posters, fliers, and literature.
- * Organize events that interest you--others are bound to be interested and will want to help out.

Q. How can you include foreign national postdocs in your association?

A.

- * Approach them one-on-one.
- * Highlight issues important to the foreign postdoc community--visas, tax issues, improvement of English skills, Immigration and Naturalization Service.
- * Contact key people who are active in the foreign postdoc community or organizations.
- * Look for an office of foreign student/fellow affairs and work through that office.
- * Develop an orientation package directed at foreign postdocs.

Q. How does your organization deal with "continuity of leadership" issues?

A.

- * Promote members from within to be officers. Additionally, potential members/leaders are personally identified and approached to ask for their participation.
- * Nurture your potential future officers.
- * Remind postdocs that participation can go on their CVs. They can gain valuable experience in chairing meetings, conference development, fund raising, and grant-writing.
- * Loosening the formal structure may help maintain leadership, as it encourages more ad hoc members.
- * If your institution has an office that handles postdoctoral affairs, use it! This office and its staff can help with continuity and history.

Q. What is the official status and benefits of postdocs at participants' institutions?

A. In general, the biggest problem is that multiple funding mechanisms are used to support postdocs. There often isn't a single official status at an institution and there may be no status for a postdoc funded from a source external to the institution. (For more on status, check out Part 1 and Part 2 of Postdocs Are Not All Created Equal).

Stanford's postdocs are designated as nonmatriculated graduate students and are required to pay tuition. As a result, many are paid below the Stanford minimum. (To learn more, check out the Stanford University Postdocs Web site and Part 2 of the Postdoc Network's article on status.)

NIH has official appointment mechanisms and job descriptions in place. However, all are considered "trainees," not federal employees, so there is no access to standard federal employee benefits. (NIH trainees only receive health insurance, but can purchase dental benefits.) (Editor's note: government facilities and labs vary on postdoc status, see Part 2 of the status series.)

From all of the organizations--new and old:

Our biggest piece of advice: Go for it! Postdoctoral organizations at a number of institutions have made enormous differences in the working conditions, career development opportunities, and social lives of their colleagues. And remember, you are not alone--check out the Postdoc Network's database of postdoc organizations. The links in this database will give you more information about our organizations' structures, programs and accomplishments. Good luck!

Deborah Swope
United States
19 January 2001

Appendix 4: UNC PDA experience

Who Shall Lead? The New UNC Postdoc Association Takes Big Steps

(http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/1190/who_shall_lead_the_new_unc_postdoc_association_takes_big_steps)

In its first year of existence, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Postdoc Association (UNC PDA) saw many remarkable successes. The benefits committee designed and conducted a campus-wide survey of postdocs to help the PDA set priorities for discussion with the UNC administration. The information committee began work on a Web site to link postdocs to relevant administrative and career-development resources. The steering committee, composed of volunteers from all PDA committees, dealt with administrative issues, forging contacts with UNC officials, organizing support for the PDA, and obtaining official UNC recognition for the association. And in June 2001 the programming committee capped the year with a successful full-day career symposium attended by 400 postdocs and graduate students.

Throughout this process, the UNC administration enthusiastically encouraged the PDA's efforts, and many groups on campus were anxious to help financially, including the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education, the graduate school, the medical school, and individual research departments.

It was only after our successful first year that the UNC PDA began to consider a system of organization and management to guarantee continued success into the future; the nascent UNC PDA was a largely organic and unstructured organization. Following release of a report by the National Academies of Science Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (COSEPUP) entitled "Enhancing the Postdoctoral Experience for Scientists and Engineers", Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Research Linda Dykstra created a Postdoctoral Committee chaired by Sharon Milgram, an associate professor in the department of cell and molecular physiology. During an open meeting of the postdoc committee in October 2000, it became clear that although postdocs had a generally positive experience at UNC, most shared concerns about several specific issues. Not surprisingly, improving standard benefits, increasing career development options, and providing administrative information relating to postdoc concerns topped the list. Corresponding committees (benefits, programming, and information) composed of interested postdocs were immediately established. The UNC PDA had begun to take shape.

The early achievements of the committees were especially impressive because they were accomplished without oversight. When the committees were first formed, there wasn't a postdoc association with specific goals, plans for action, timetables, or agreed-upon methods; the proto-PDA consisted of informal groups of postdocs interested in making things better for themselves and their peers. Clearly these individuals had ideas and the drive to realize them. Each committee was able to set its own ambitious priorities and divide the work among members, who then accomplished more than anyone had originally hoped. It never occurred to us that our goals might be too ambitious. Not knowing that our goals were lofty probably helped us to achieve them.

In spite of the early successes, many felt that ongoing effectiveness required a more formal structure with a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities. We believed that a more formal structure would improve the PDA's efficiency and bolster its credibility with postdocs and the UNC administration. We anticipated the administration would have more respect for the PDA if they were confident that we were a coherent organization that represented the concerns of the postdoc community. Likewise, we expected the postdoc community to be more supportive of the PDA if they knew that it was effectively conveying postdoc concerns to the administration.

The trick was to develop a structure that was both representative and effective without creating a cumbersome bureaucracy that discouraged involvement and made it more difficult to get things done.

When considering a formal structure with detailed rules and elected officers, we were reminded that our early successes had been achieved by a steering committee that reached its decisions through consensus. Yet we felt that complete informality with no specifically delegated responsibilities would hinder the PDA's efforts with a university administration that seemed most comfortable with formal interactions.

We decided on a compromise in which the practical advantages of our informal organization would be tempered with a few small but significant changes. The core of the PDA continues to be the individual committees described above, each one focused on its particular area and composed of volunteers. Membership on committees is open to any postdoc, and periodic "Town Hall"-style meetings give all postdocs the opportunity to be heard without having to devote time to regular participation. The steering committee, consisting of two participants from each of the committees, coordinates the PDA's efforts and works directly with the UNC administration. The most significant change is in the selection of officers (i.e. chairperson, secretary, etc.) for the steering committee. Officers are selected by a consensus of all current committee participants. We believe this process will insure that our representatives to the administration are well acquainted with the efforts of all the committees.

The chairperson is our liaison with UNC administration, attending meetings with administrators whenever postdoc issues are discussed, and relating relevant information to the postdoc community. The secretary will help keep postdocs informed about the PDA's activities. We are also considering creating a public relations position to coordinate the exchange of information with other PDA's and generate publicity for the PDA through campus publications. Each committee will recruit new participants to help maintain continuity through inevitable transitions.

As with any nascent organization, we probably will need to learn much by trial and error. The objective is to remain flexible so we have the best chance of discovering more effective ways to achieve our goals. The UNC PDA has no constitution or by-laws as yet, but is likely to consider such options in the next few months. What we have, as expressed in our mission statement, is a goal to "... improve the UNC experience for postdoctoral fellows by fostering a sense of community among junior researchers, facilitating communication with the university, and promoting the professional development of all UNC postdoctoral fellows." We have created a system that is simple and efficient but also has the formal elements necessary to provide credibility and ensure progress. Together with the enthusiasm of its members, these features should bring the UNC PDA even greater success in the future.

* Jim Fiordalisi is a postdoc in the department of radiation oncology at UNC, Chapel Hill, and has been an active member of the programming, information, and steering committees of the UNC PDA since its inception.

James Fiordalisi
United States
21 September 2001

Appendix 5: Stanford PDA experience

History and Evolution of the Stanford University Postdocs Association

(http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/0980/history_and_evolution_of_the_stanford_university_postdocs_association)

This March, the Stanford University Postdocs Association (SUPD) hosted its third town hall meeting. One hundred eighty-five people attended, including the associate dean for postdoctoral affairs and representatives from the dean of graduate policy and the provost's offices. Both the San Jose Mercury News and Palo Alto Daily News reported on the event, as did two different campus newspapers. You may be wondering, "How did this grassroots organization gain such prominence?"

The Beginning

In 1998, two separate groups of postdocs began to work on postdoctoral issues at Stanford. Tonya Bliss and Jens Skakkebaek formed SUPD to provide a mechanism for social and professional interactions among postdocs throughout the Stanford community. To this end, they began to organize social events, and, most importantly, created a postdoc e-mail list.

A separate group of postdocs observed some common themes in postdocs' complaints about their experiences at Stanford. Monica Torres, Shirin Khambata Ford, Chris Karlovich, and Kent Grindstaff began to approach administrators within the medical school and throughout the university to discuss core issues relevant to most postdocs: disparate job classifications (including a "nonmatriculated graduate student" title requiring tuition payments; see sidebar), poor salary and benefits, and the lack of a postdoc-appropriate grievance procedure. To encourage the administration to improve conditions for postdocs, the issues were presented in a context of concern that the recruitment of future postdocs was being compromised and, therefore, the quality of research performed at Stanford would suffer.

By August 1999, the two groups had merged into one SUPD, with the original SUPD becoming the Social Committee and the second group becoming the Political Action Committee, later renamed the Postdoc Advocacy Committee (PAC). Together, we organized a town hall meeting open to the entire postdoc population and the Stanford community. The main goals of the meeting were to survey postdocs to provide some quantitative data on the postdoc experience at Stanford and to share information about core issues.

The survey data confirmed what the PAC had suspected:

- A significant percentage of Stanford postdocs were being paid salaries below Stanford's official minimum.
- Postdocs were spending a huge amount of money on rent.
- Many postdocs were being classified as "visiting scholars" as a way for departments to circumvent paying tuition and health care costs.
- The majority of postdocs found the student classification detrimental.
- Almost no postdocs thought that there was a sufficient mechanism for resolving workplace disputes.
- Perhaps most importantly for our later negotiations, nearly 40% of respondents were neutral or negative about whether they would encourage prospective postdocs to choose Stanford.

With the survey results in hand, the PAC scheduled meetings with Michael Cowan (then associate dean of student services at the medical school) and Tomas Wasow (then associate dean of graduate policy) to lobby for improved treatment of postdocs. Both deans were supportive and helped to arrange a meeting in late August 1999 with then-Provost John Hennessy. The PAC members were pleased to discover that the provost was well informed about the basic issues affecting postdocs and was open to the ideas of reduced or eliminated tuition, improved salary and benefits, and a unified postdoc classification.

Initial Changes

When we convened a second town hall meeting the following month, Cowan reported on a high-level meeting about postdoc issues and presented a proposed set of policy changes. For the first time, it appeared that real changes would be made. For example, the much-hated tuition was lowered, significantly reducing the tax liabilities of postdocs on fellowships. Medical school departments agreed to match the National Institutes of Health (NIH) minimum salary following a 3-year phase-in, postdoc representatives were to be added to "appropriate" university committees, and appointment letters for new postdocs were to be signed by both the PI and the department chair.

Lessons to Be Learned

But the next few months taught us several lessons. First, even the best of intentions are difficult to change into good policies. Although we were excited about finally having postdoc issues discussed at the highest levels of the Stanford administration, it quickly became obvious that although the general sentiment of the proposed changes was positive, the details were unclear. In addition, the proposed policies had entirely failed to address several major issues. For example, although the university agreed to "substantially increase" the minimum salary scale, the scale still did not reach the NIH/National Research Service Awards (NRSA) levels. And the different treatment of postdocs in the medical school and in the rest of the university was not addressed. The issue of housing assistance was completely ignored.

But one immediate, positive change was that Cowan was appointed as the first associate dean for postdoctoral affairs, and she officially assumed the responsibility of providing services to postdocs throughout the university. Although having a central office has improved the monitoring of salaries and benefits, the Postdoc Office still cannot easily monitor the salaries of the many postdocs that work outside of the medical school because of differences in the way postdocs are treated in the medical school versus in the rest of the university and in the way information about these postdocs and their fellowships is entered into the university's computer systems. Additionally, the non-medical school postdocs are still not eligible for the full benefits guaranteed to all medical school postdocs.

Our second lesson: Administrations change, even at universities! Stanford inaugurated a new president and a new provost in 2000. We have had positive interactions with each of these administrators, and having a new provost was a good excuse for arranging a meeting with him. Provost Etchemendy appointed a Committee on Postdoctoral Affairs, which has given us regular, direct contacts with administrators and influential faculty. We have been able to directly contribute to the committee's recommendations, but, again, change has been slow. At our meeting with the provost in September, he seemed willing to act on the issues of student status and improved salaries quickly; he requested that information both on the legal implications and how the faculty would react to such a change be presented to him within a few weeks. Since this project became part of the Committee on Postdoctoral Affairs' job, 8 months have passed.

The third lesson was that different university offices were responsible for distinct aspects of policies pertaining to postdocs. For instance, although the provost agreed in principle to allow postdocs to serve on university-wide committees, it is the secretary of the university who actually arranges the selection of a postdoc and officially establishes the position on a committee. Sending copies of all PAC communications to a group of administrators helped us locate the correct individuals and establish relationships with each of them.

Finally, we learned that being persistent and well organized would help us achieve our goals. When the original PAC members began taking permanent jobs, we developed a set of bylaws to give our group a mechanism for continuity. In addition, these rules contributed to our reputation as an official group of professionals and created contact mechanisms for administrators and the press. We developed a written information packet and talking points, and have thus been able to make coherent, consistent presentations to administrators and faculty members on a wide variety of topics on very short notice. We used our research skills to track down relevant statistics, and we performed our own calculations for rent and tax issues rather than relying on the university to calculate for us. And we have continued to ask questions out loud and in writing when we were not satisfied with the answers we received.

* Audrey Ettinger earned her undergraduate degree at Bryn Mawr College and her Ph.D. in neuroscience at Washington University in St. Louis. She currently is an NRSA Postdoctoral Fellow in the neuroscience

program at Stanford University studying the molecular control of retinal cell fate. In her spare time, Audrey is the co-chair of the Stanford University Postdocs -Postdoc Advocacy Committee (SUPD-PAC).

Audrey Ettinger
United States
18 May 2001

Appendix 6: UCSF PDA experience

The Ongoing Challenges of the UCSF Postdoc Association

(http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/0700/the_ongoing_challenges_of_the_ucsf_postdoc_association)

Many postdocs express dissatisfaction with their overall training, including a lack of mentoring, poor benefits, and low salaries that, in cities with a high cost-of-living, make it difficult to get by. In an effort to gain recognition and advocate for improvement of the postdoc experience, postdocs at institutions like the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), have organized "grass-roots" associations to bring positive change and to inspire other institutions by example. However, starting a postdoc association is only half the battle--maintaining continuity in initiatives and leadership remains a challenge.

The UCSF Postdoctoral Scholars Association (PSA) was formed in 1995 by a small group of concerned and frustrated--but eager--individuals who sought to bring recognition and improvement of training to postdocs. The PSA developed a basic structure, with its own Web page, e-mail network, and monthly meetings. As with many "grass-roots" organizations, its efforts were fueled by the work of about a dozen individuals. These founders conducted and published a campus-wide survey on postdoctoral training and acquired funding to create an educational seminar series entitled Practice of Science. The Practice of Science series was very well received by postdocs and faculty, because it provided a means to address topics, such as ethics in science and career development, that are not typically discussed in a laboratory setting. The PSA's efforts also led to postdoc representation on several campus committees. But most importantly, perhaps, the PSA raised awareness among faculty and administrators that postdocs are a unique group with many unmet needs.

Although the PSA achieved many of its goals and impacted the campus in several ways during these first couple of years, many of the critical concerns remained. Salaries were still low, policies were inconsistent, and reports of abusive behavior among advisors continued. Some campus administrators and faculty listened sympathetically, whereas others either feared unionization or seemed indifferent--none could offer real solutions to these problems. Progress was slow.

As a result, and despite the group's eagerness, the PSA lost momentum and motivation. Many of the postdocs involved in the PSA moved on to new jobs, and in some cases, there was no one to take their place. Encouraging participation was difficult because many postdocs felt their efforts were in vain. This loss of leadership was compounded by a lack of operating funds and infrastructure and by the inability to reach out to the widely dispersed postdoc community. With many issues still unresolved, the PSA became dormant.

Although a new group of postdocs eventually did come along to restart the association, these new PSA members found themselves "reinventing the wheel" in an attempt to both identify the important issues and determine what approaches had already been taken. Again, the momentum was lost to a frustrating feeling of futility.

But in the spring of 1999, the UCSF PSA began its rebirth. Reorganization began with a decision to bring back the Practice of Science series that had been on hiatus for 2 years. A group of 10 ready and willing volunteers met to discuss the format and potential topics. Through this discussion, many of the pressing issues currently faced by postdocs reemerged. It became clear that addressing these issues required much more than what the seminar series alone could offer.

With a generous contribution of time, effort, and help from key faculty and staff, the PSA delivered the Practice of Science series in early 2000. In addition, we renewed our intent to advocate for improved training of campus postdocs. But the primary goal was to end the productive/nonproductive cycle that the PSA had been experiencing so that we did not see our efforts languish once again.

Now, in the latter part of the year 2000, the PSA finds itself in good form and with strong hopes for continued progress. We are still challenged, of course, by many of the same concerns of losing continuity, interest, and support. However, we hope to overcome these concerns by focusing on two main objectives: gaining institutional support and educating campus postdocs.

Partnering with the administration and faculty is essential. Enlightened faculty and administrators understand the mutual benefits of partnering to create a strong training environment. These individuals are eager to participate and are worth befriending. At UCSF, recent efforts by the graduate dean and the PSA have led to the placement of a team that, by 2001, will cooperatively support postdoc training. This team will include a dedicated postdoc administrator and staff at the campus Career Center and at the Office of Academic Enrichment. The PSA has also partnered with the chairpersons of the seven basic science departments in which the majority of UCSF postdocs reside. These departments have generously allocated funds to maintain the Practice of Science series and to support activities that will foster community among postdocs.

Institutional support is clearly important, but maintaining an active postdoc association that will advocate and educate is still the responsibility of the postdocs. Building membership through advertising and recruitment has been critical, as has the ability to communicate with the dispersed postdoc community. Our Web page and e-mail listserv are important communication channels that we are continuing to expand.

But a more difficult challenge is empowering postdocs to be their own best advocates. The training and career development of a postdoc involves more than working at the bench and publishing papers. Exercising critical thinking, networking, independence, leadership, management, and team-building skills are aspects of job training that are seldom addressed in the academic setting. Postdocs can begin to develop these skills by simply attending social and educational functions, then gain further experience by taking on more active roles with a postdoc association as a committee representative or leader.

The problems and difficulties faced by postdocs today will not be solved overnight. But maintaining a supportive environment that includes the participation of the institution and an organized postdoc community will provide the tools that can sustain efforts to address today's problems as well as those that we'll face in the years to come.

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